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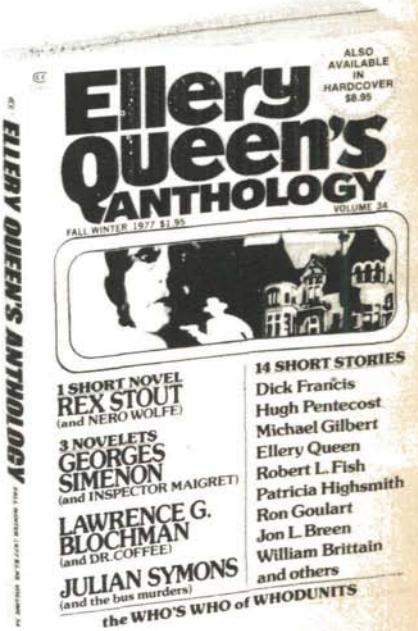

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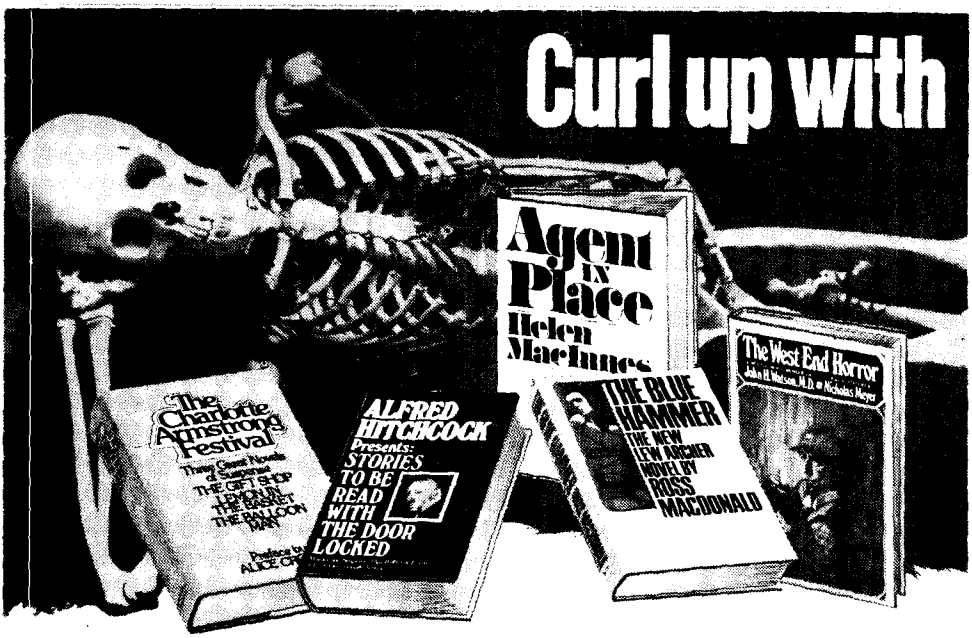

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THE CASE OF THE SHAGGY CAPS

by RUTH RENDELL

"Blewits," said Inspector Burden, "Parasols, Horns of Plenty, Morels, and Boletus. Mean anything to you?"

Chief Inspector Wexford shrugged. "Sounds like one of those magazine quizzes. What have these in common? I'll make a guess and say they're *crustaceae.* Or sea anemones. How about that?"

"They are edible fungi," said Burden.

"Are they now? And what have edible fungi to do with Mrs. Hannah Kingman throwing herself off, or being pushed off, a balcony?"

The two men were sitting in Wexford's office at the police station, Kingsmarkham, in the County of Sussex. The month was November, but Wexford had only just returned from his holiday. And while he had been away, enjoying two weeks of Italian autumn, Hannah Kingman had committed suicide. Or so Burden had thought at first. Now he was in a dilemma, and as soon as Wexford had walked in that Monday morning, Burden had begun to tell the whole story to his chief.

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Wexford, getting on for 60, was a tall, ungainly, rather ugly man who had once been fat to the point of obesity but had slimmed to gauntness for reasons of health. Nearly 20 years his junior, Burden had the slenderness of a man who has always been thin. His face was ascetic, handsome in a frosty way. The older man, who had a good wife who looked after him devotedly, nevertheless always looked as if his clothes came off the peg from the War on Want shop, while the younger, a widower, was sartorially immaculate. A tramp and a Beau Brummell, they seemed to be, but the dandy relied on the tramp, trusted him, understood his powers and his perception. In secret he almost worshipped him.

Without his chief he had felt a little at sea in this case. Everything had pointed at first to Hannah Kingman's having killed herself. She had been a manic-depressive, with a strong sense of her own inadequacy; apparently her marriage, though not of long duration, had been unhappy, and her previous marriage had failed. Even in the absence of a suicide note or suicide threats, Burden would have taken her death for self-destruction—if her brother hadn't come along and told him about the edible fungi. And Wexford hadn't been there to do what he always could do—sort out sheep from goats and wheat from chaff.

"The thing is," Burden said across the desk, "we're not looking for proof of murder so much as proof of *attempted* murder. Axel Kingman could have pushed his wife off that balcony—he has no alibi for the time in question—but I had no reason to think he had done so until I was told of an attempt to murder her some two weeks before."

"Which attempt has something to do with edible fungi?"

Burden nodded. "Say with administering to her some r. ·ious substance in a stew made from edible fungi. Though if he did it, God knows how he did it, because three other people, including himself, ate the stew without ill effects. I think I'd better tell you about it from the beginning."

"I think you had," said Wexford.

"The facts," Burden began, very like a Prosecuting Counsel, "are as follows. Axel Kingman is thirty-five years old and he keeps a health-food shop here in the High Street called Harvest Home. Know it?" When Wexford signified by a nod that he did, Burden went on, "He used to be a teacher in Myringham, and for about seven years before he came here he'd been living with a

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woman named Corinne Last. He left her, gave up his job, put all the capital he had into this shop, and married a Mrs. Hannah Nicholson."

"He's some sort of food freak, I take it," said Wexford.

Burden wrinkled his nose. "Lot of affected nonsense," he said. "Have you ever noticed what thin pale weeds these health-food people are? While the folks who live on roast beef and suet and whiskey and plum cake are full of beans and rarin' to go."

"Is Kingman a thin pale weed?"

"A feeble—what's the word?—esthete, if you ask me. Anyway, he and Hannah opened this shop and took a flat in the high-rise tower our planning geniuses have been pleased to raise over the top of it. The fifth floor. Corinne Last, according to her and according to Kingman, accepted it after a while and they all remained friends."

"Tell me about them," Wexford said. "Leave the facts for a bit and tell me about them."

Burden never found this easy. He was inclined to describe people as "just ordinary" or "just like anyone else," a negative attitude which exasperated Wexford. So he made an effort. "Kingman looks the sort who wouldn't hurt a fly. The fact is, I'd apply the word gentle to him if I wasn't coming round to thinking he's a cold-blooded wife killer. He's a total abstainer with a bee in his bonnet about drink. His father went bankrupt and finally died of a coronary as a result of alcoholism, and our Kingman is an anti-booze fanatic.

"The dead woman was twenty-nine. Her first husband left her after six months of marriage and went off with some girl friend of hers. Hannah went back to live with her parents and had a part-time job helping out with the meals at the school where Kingman was a teacher. That was where they met."

"And the other woman?" said Wexford.

Burden's face took on a repressive expression. Sex outside marriage, however sanctioned by custom and general approval, was always distasteful to him. That, in the course of his work, he almost daily came across illicit sex had done nothing to mitigate his disapproval. As Wexford sometimes derisively put it, you would think that in Burden's eyes all the suffering in the world, and certainly all the crime, somehow derived from men and women going to bed together outside the bonds of wedlock. "God knows why he didn't marry her," Burden now said. "Personally I think

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things were a lot better in the days when education authorities put their foot down about immorality among teachers."

"Let's not have your views on that now, Mike," said Wexford. "Presumably Hannah Kingman didn't die because her husband didn't come to her a pure virgin."

Burden flushed slightly. "I'll tell you about this Corinne Last. She's very good-looking, if you like the dark sort of intense type. Her father left her some money and the house where she and Kingman lived, and she still lives in it. She's one of those women who seem to be good at everything they put their hands to. She paints and sells her paintings. She makes her own clothes, she's more or less the star in the local dramatic society, she's a violinist and plays in some string trio. Also she writes for health magazines and she's the author of a cookbook."

"It would look then," Wexford put in, "as if Kingman split up with her because all this was more than he could take. And hence he took up with the dull little school-meals lady. No competition from her, I fancy."

"I daresay you're right. As a matter of fact, that theory has already been put to me."

"By whom?" said Wexford. "Just where did you get all this information, Mike?"

"From an angry young man, the fourth member of the quartet who happens to be Hannah's brother. His name is John Hood and I think he's got a lot more to tell. But it's time I left off describing the people and got on with the story.

"No one saw Hannah fall from the balcony. It happened last Thursday afternoon at about four. According to her husband, he was in a sort of office behind the shop doing what he always did on early closing day—stock-taking and sticking labels on various bottles and packets.

"She fell onto a hard-top parking area at the back of the flats, and her body was found by a neighbor a couple of hours later between two parked cars. We were sent for, and Kingman seemed to be distraught. I asked him if he had had any idea that his wife would have wished to take her own life and he said she had never threatened to do so but had lately been very depressed and there had been quarrels, principally about money. Her doctor had put her on tranquillizers—of which, by the way, Kingman disapproved—and the doctor himself, old Dr. Castle, told me Mrs. Kingman had been to him for depression and because she felt her

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life wasn't worth living and she was a drag on her husband. He wasn't surprised that she had killed herself and neither, by that time, was I. We were all set for an inquest verdict of suicide while the balance of the mind was disturbed when John Hood walked in here and told me Kingman had attempted to murder his wife on a previous occasion."

"He told you just like that?"

"Pretty well. It's plain he doesn't like Kingman, and no doubt he was fond of his sister. He also seems to like and admire Corinne Last. He told me that on a Saturday night at the end of October the four of them had a meal together in the Kingmans' flat. It was a lot of vegetarian stuff cooked by Kingman—he always did the cooking—and one of the dishes was made out of what I'm old-fashioned enough, or maybe narrow-minded enough, to call toadstools. They all ate it and they were all okay but for Hannah who got up from the table, vomited for hours, and apparently was quite seriously ill."

Wexford's eyebrows went up. "Elucidate, please," he said.

Burden sat back, put his elbows on the arms of the chair, and pressed the tips of his fingers together. "A few days before this meal was eaten, Kingman and Hood met at the squash club of which they are both members. Kingman told Hood that Corinne Last had promised to get him some edible fungi called Shaggy Caps from her own garden, the garden of the house which they had at one time shared. A crop of these things show themselves every autumn under a tree in this garden. I've seen them myself, but we'll come to that in a minute.

"Kingman's got a thing about using weeds and whatnot for cooking, makes salads out of dandelions and sorrel, and he swears by this fungi rubbish, says they've got far more flavor than mushrooms. Give me something that comes in a plastic bag from the supermarket every time, but no doubt it takes all sorts to make a world. By the way, this cookbook of Corinne Last's is called *Cooking for Nothing,* and all the recipes are for making dishes out of stuff you pull up by the wayside or pluck from the hedgerow."

"These Warty Blobs or Spotted Puffets or whatever, had he cooked them before?"

"Shaggy Caps," said Burden, grinning, "or *coprinus comatus.* Oh, yes, every year, and every year he and Corinne had eaten the resulting stew. He told Hood he was going to cook them again this time, and Hood says he seemed very grateful to Corinne for

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being so—well, magnanimous."

"Yes, I can see it would have been a wrench for her. Like hearing 'our tune' in the company of your ex-lover and your supplanter." Wexford put on a vibrant growl. " 'Can you bear the sight of me eating our toadstools with another'?"

"As a matter of fact," said Burden seriously, "it could have been just like that. Anyway, the upshot of it was that Hood was invited round for the following Saturday to taste these delicacies and was told that Corinne would be there. Perhaps it was that fact which made him accept. Well, the day came. Hood looked in on his sister at lunchtime. She showed him the pot containing the stew which Kingman had already made and she said *she had tasted it* and it was delicious. She also showed Hood half a dozen specimens of Shaggy Caps which she said Kingman hadn't needed and which they would fry for their breakfast. This is what she showed him."

Burden opened a drawer in the desk and produced one of those plastic bags which he had said so inspired him with confidence. But the contents of this one hadn't come from a supermarket. He removed the wire fastener and tipped out four whitish scaly objects. They were egg-shaped, or rather elongated ovals, each with a short fleshy stalk.

"I picked them myself this morning," he said, "from Corinne Last's garden. When they get bigger, the egg-shaped bit opens like an umbrella or a pagoda really, and there are sort of black gills underneath. You're supposed to eat them when they're in the stage these are."

"I suppose you've got a book on fungi?" said Wexford.

"Here." This also was produced from the drawer. *British Fungi, Edible and Poisonous*. "And here we are—Shaggy Caps."

Burden opened it at the *Edible* section and at a line and wash drawing of the species he held in his hand. He handed it to the Chief Inspector.

"*Coprinus comatus*," Wexford read aloud, "*a common species, attaining when full-grown a height of nine inches. The fungus is frequently to be found, during late summer and autumn, growing in fields, hedgerows, and often in gardens. It should be eaten before the cap opens and disgorges its inky fluid, but is at all times quite harmless.*" He put the book down but didn't close it. "Go on, please, Mike," he said.

"Hood called for Corinne and they arrived together. They got there just after eight. At about eight fifteen they all sat down to

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table and began the meal with avocado *vinaigrette*. The next course was to be the stew, followed by nut cutlets with a salad and then an applecake. Very obviously, there was no wine or any liquor on account of Kingman's prejudice. They drank grape juice from the shop.

"The kitchen opens directly out of the living-dining room. Kingman brought in the stew in a large tureen and served it himself at the table, beginning, of course, with Corinne. Each one of those Shaggy Caps had been sliced in half lengthwise and the pieces were floating in a thickish gravy to which carrots, onions, and other vegetables had been added. Now, ever since he had been invited to this meal, Hood had been feeling uneasy about eating fungi, but Corinne had reassured him, and once he began to eat it and saw the others were eating it quite happily, he stopped worrying for the time being. In fact, he had a second helping.

"Kingman took the plates out and the empty tureen and immediately *rinsed them under the tap*. Both Hood and Corinne Last have told me this, though Kingman says it was something he always did, being fastidious about things of that sort."

"Surely his ex-girl friend could confirm or deny that," Wexford put in, "since they lived together for so long."

"We must ask her. All traces of the stew were rinsed away. Kingman then brought in the nut concoction and the salad, but before he could begin to serve them Hannah jumped up, covered her mouth with her napkin, and rushed to the bathroom.

"After a while Corinne went to her. Hood could hear a violent vomiting from the bathroom. He remained in the living room while Kingman and Corinne were both in the bathroom with Hannah. No one ate any more. Kingman eventually came back, said that Hannah must have picked up some 'bug' and that he had put her to bed. Hood went into the bedroom where Hannah was lying on the bed with Corinne sitting beside her. Her face was greenish and covered with sweat and she was evidently in great pain because while he was there she doubled up and groaned. She had to go to the bathroom again and that time Kingman had to carry her back.

"Hood suggested Dr. Castle should be sent for, but this was strenuously opposed by Kingman who dislikes doctors and is one of those people who go in for herbal remedies—raspberry-leaf tablets and camomile tea and that sort of thing. Also he told Hood,

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rather absurdly, that Hannah had had quite enough to do with doctors and that if this wasn't some gastric germ it was the result of her taking 'dangerous' tranquillizers.

"Hood thought Hannah was seriously ill and the argument got heated, with Hood trying to make Kingman either call a doctor or take her to a hospital. Kingman wouldn't do it and Corinne took his part. Hood is one of those angry but weak people who are all bluster, and although he might have called a doctor himself, he didn't. The effect on him of Corinne again, I suppose. What he did do was tell Kingman he was a fool to mess about cooking things everyone knew weren't safe, to which Kingman replied that if the Shaggy Caps were dangerous, how was it they weren't all ill? Eventually, at about midnight, Hannah stopped retching, seemed to have no more pain, and fell asleep. Hood drove Corinne home, returned to the Kingmans and remained there for the rest of the night, sleeping on their sofa.

"In the morning Hannah seemed perfectly well, though weak, which rather upset Kingman's theory about the gastric bug. Relations between the brothers-in-law were strained. Kingman said he hadn't liked Hood's suggestions and that when he wanted to see his sister he, Kingman, would rather he came there when he was out or in the shop. Hood went off home, and since that day he hasn't seen Kingman.

"The day after his sister's death he stormed in here, told me what I've told you, and accused Kingman of trying to poison Hannah. He was wild and nearly hysterical, but I felt I couldn't dismiss this allegation as—well, the ravings of a bereaved person. There were too many peculiar circumstances—the unhappiness of the marriage, the fact of Kingman rinsing those plates, his refusal to call a doctor. Was I right?"

Burden stopped and sat waiting for approval. It came in the form of a not very enthusiastic nod.

After a moment Wexford spoke. "Could Kingman have pushed her off that balcony, Mike?"

"She was a small fragile woman. It was physically possible. The back of the flats isn't overlooked. There's nothing behind but the parking area and then open fields. Kingman could have gone up by the stairs instead of using the lift and come down by the stairs. Two of the flats on the lower floors are empty. Below the Kingmans lives a bedridden woman whose husband was at work. Below that the tenant, a young married woman, was in but she

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saw and heard nothing. The invalid says she thinks she heard a scream during the afternoon but she did nothing about it, and if she did hear it, so what? It seems to me that a suicide, in those circumstances, is as likely to cry out as a murder victim."

"Okay," said Wexford. "Now to return to the curious business of this meal. The idea would presumably be that Kingman intended to kill her that night but that his plan misfired because whatever he gave her wasn't toxic enough. She was very ill but she didn't die. He chose those means and that company so that he would have witnesses to his innocence. They all ate the stew out of the same tureen, but only Hannah was affected by it. How then are you suggesting he gave her whatever poison he did give her?"

"I'm not," said Burden frankly, "but others are making suggestions. Hood's a bit of a fool, and first of all he would only keep on about all fungi being dangerous and the whole dish being poisonous. When I pointed out that this was obviously not so, he said Kingman must have slipped something into Hannah's plate, or else it was the salt."

"What salt?"

"He remembered that no one but Hannah took salt with the stew. But that's absurd because Kingman couldn't have known that would happen. He wouldn't have dared put, say, arsenic in the saltcellar on the thin chance that only she would take salt. Besides, she recovered far too quickly for it to have been arsenic. Corinne Last, however, has a more feasible suggestion.

"Not that she goes along with Hood. She refuses to consider the possibility that Kingman might be guilty. But when I pressed her she said she was not actually sitting at the table while the stew was served. She had got up and gone into the hall to fetch her handbag. So she didn't see Kingman serve Hannah." Burden reached across and picked up the book Wexford had left open at the description and drawing of the Shaggy Caps. He flicked over to the *Poisonous* section and pushed the book back to the Chief Inspector. "Have a look at some of these."

"Ah, yes," said Wexford. "Our old friend, the Fly Agaric. A nice-looking little red job with white spots, much favored by illustrators of children's books. They usually stick a frog on top of it and a gnome underneath. I see that when ingested it causes nausea, vomiting, tetanic convulsions, coma, and death. Lots of these Agarics, aren't there? Purple, Crested, Warty, Verdigris—all more or less lethal. Aha! The Death Cap, *amanita phalloides*.

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How every unpleasant. The most dangerous fungus known, it says here. Very small quantities will cause intense suffering and often death. So where does all that get us?"

"Corinne Last says that the Death Cap is quite common round here. What she doesn't say, but what I infer, is that Kingman could have got hold of it easily. Now suppose he cooked just one specimen separately and dropped it into the stew just before he brought it in from the kitchen? When he comes to serve Hannah he spoons up for her this specimen, or the pieces of it, in the same way as someone might select a special piece of chicken for someone out of a casserole. The gravy was thick, it wasn't like a thin soup."

Wexford looked dubious. "Well, we won't dismiss it as a theory. If he had contaminated the rest of the stew and others had been ill, that would have made it look even more like an accident, which was presumably what he wanted. But there's one drawback to that, Mike. If he meant Hannah to die, and was unscrupulous enough not to mind about Corinne and Hood being made ill, why did he rinse the plates? To *prove* that it was an accident, he would have wanted above all to keep some of that stew for analysis when the time came, for analysis would have shown the presence of poisonous as well as non-poisonous fungi, and it would have seemed that he had merely been careless.

"But let's go and talk to these people, shall we?"

The shop called Harvest Home was closed. Wexford and Burden went down an alley at the side of the block, passed the glass-doored main entrance, and went to the back to a door that was labeled *Stairs and Emergency Exit.* They entered a small tiled vestibule and began to mount a steepish flight of stairs.

On each floor was a front door and a door to the lift. There was no one about. If there had been and they had had no wish to be seen, it would only have been necessary to wait behind the bend in the stairs until whoever it was had got into the lift. The bell by the front door on the fifth floor was marked *A. and H. Kingman.* Wexford rang it.

The man who admitted them was smallish and mild-looking and he looked sad. He showed Wexford the balcony from which his wife had fallen. It was one of two in the flat, the other being larger and extending outside the living-room windows. This one was outside a glazed kitchen door, a place for hanging washing

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and for gardening of the window-box variety. Herbs grew in pots, and in a long trough there still remained frost-bitten tomato vines. The wall surrounding the balcony was about three feet high, the drop sheer to the hardtop below.

"Were you surprised that your wife committed suicide, Mr. Kingman?" said Wexford.

Kingman didn't answer directly. "My wife set a very low valuation on herself. When we got married I thought she was like me, a simple sort of person who doesn't ask much from life but has quite a capacity for contentment. It wasn't like that. She expected more support and more comfort and encouragement than I could give. That was especially so for the first three months of our marriage. Then she seemed to turn against me. She was very moody, always up and down. My business isn't doing very well and she was spending more money than we could afford. I don't know where all the money was going, and we quarreled about it. Then she'd become depressed and say she was no use to me, she'd be better dead."

He had given, Wexford thought, rather a long explanation for which he hadn't been asked. But it could be that these thoughts, defensive yet self-reproachful, were at the moment uppermost in his mind. "Mr. Kingman," he said, "we have reason to believe, as you know, that foul play may have been involved here. I should like to ask you a few questions about a meal you cooked on October 29th, after which your wife was ill."

"I can guess who's been telling you about that."

Wexford took no notice. "When did Miss Last bring you these—er, Shaggy Caps?"

"On the evening of the 28th. I made the stew from them in the morning, according to Miss Last's own recipe."

"Was there any other type of fungus in the flat at the time?"

"Mushrooms, probably."

"Did you at any time add any noxious object or substance to that stew, Mr. Kingman?"

Kingman said quietly, wearily, "Of course not. My brother-in-law has a lot of ignorant prejudices. He refuses to understand that that stew, which I have made dozens of times before in exactly the same way, was as wholesome as, say, a chicken casserole. More wholesome, in my view."

"Very well. Nevertheless, your wife was very ill. Why didn't you call a doctor?"

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"Because my wife was not 'very' ill. She had pains and diarrhoea, that's all. Perhaps you aren't aware of what the symptoms of fungus poisoning are. The victim doesn't just have pain and sickness. His vision is impaired, he very likely blacks out or has convulsions of the kind associated with tetanus. There was nothing like that with Hannah."

"It was unfortunate that you rinsed those plates. Had you not done so and called a doctor, the remains of that stew would almost certainly have been sent for analysis and if it was as harmless as you say, all this investigation could have been avoided."

"It was harmless," Kingman said stonily.

Out in the car Wexford said, "I'm inclined to believe him, Mike. And unless Hood or Corinne Last has something really positive to tell us, I'd let it rest. Shall we go and see her next?"

The cottage she had shared with Axel Kingman was on a lonely stretch of road outside the village of Myfleet. It was a stone cottage with a slate roof, surrounded by a well-tended pretty garden. A green Ford Escort stood on the drive in front of a weatherboard garage. Under a big old apple tree, from which the yellow leaves were falling, the Shaggy Caps, immediately recognizable, grew in three thick clumps.

She was a tall woman, the owner of this house, with a beautiful square-jawed, high-cheekboned face and a mass of dark hair. Wexford was at once reminded of the Klimt painting of a languorous red-lipped woman, gold-neckleted, half covered in gold draperies; though Corinne Last wore a sweater and a denim smock. Her voice was low and measured. He had the impression she could never be flustered or caught off her guard.

"You're the author of a cookbook, I believe?" he said.

She made no answer but handed him a paperback which she took down from a bookshelf. *Cooking for Nothing, Dishes from Hedgerow and Pasture* by Corinne Last. He looked through the index and found the recipe he wanted. Opposite it was a colored photograph of six people eating what looked like brown soup. The recipe included carrots, onions, herbs, cream, and a number of other harmless ingredients. The last lines read: *Stewed Shaggy Caps are best served piping hot with wholewheat bread. For drinkables, see page 171.* He glanced at page 171, then handed the book to Burden.

"This was the dish Mr. Kingman made that night?"

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"Yes." She had a way of leaning back when she spoke and of half lowering her heavy glossy eyelids. It was serpentine and a little repellent. "I picked the Shaggy Caps myself out of this garden. I don't understand how they could have made Hannah ill, but they must have because she was fine when we first arrived. She hadn't got any sort of gastric infection, that's nonsense. And there was nothing wrong with the avocados or the dressing."

Burden put the book aside. "But you were all served stew out of the same tureen."

"I didn't see Axel actually serve Hannah. I was out of the room." The eyelids flickered and almost closed.

"Was it usual for Mr. Kingman to rinse plates as soon as they were removed?"

"Don't ask me." She moved her shoulders. "I don't know. I do know that Hannah was very ill just after eating that stew. Axel doesn't like doctors, of course, and perhaps it would have—well, embarrassed him to call Dr. Castle in the circumstances. Hannah had black spots in front of her eyes, she was getting double vision. I was extremely concerned for her."

"But you didn't take it on yourself to get a doctor, Miss Last? Or even support Mr. Hood in his allegations?"

"Whatever John Hood said, I knew it couldn't be the Shaggy Caps." There was a note of scorn when she spoke Hood's name. "And I was rather frightened. I couldn't help thinking it would be terrible if Axel got into some sort of trouble, if there was an inquiry or something."

"There's an inquiry now, Miss Last."

"Well, it's different now, isn't it? Hannah's dead. I mean, it's not just suspicion or conjecture any more."

She saw them out and closed the front door before they had reached the garden gate. Farther along the roadside and under the hedges more Shaggy Caps could be seen as well as other kinds of fungi that Wexford couldn't identify—little mushroom-like things with pinkish gills, a cluster of small yellow umbrellas, and from the trunk of an oak tree, bulbous smoke-colored swellings that Burden said were Oyster Mushrooms.

"That woman," said Wexford, "is a mistress of the artless insinuation. She damned Kingman with almost every word, but she never came out with a direct insinuation." He shook his head. "I suppose Hood will be at work?"

"Presumably," said Burden, but Hood was not at work. He was

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waiting for them at the police station, fuming at the delay, and threatening "if something wasn't done at once" to take his grievances to the Chief Constable, even to the Home Office.

"Something is being done," said Wexford quietly. "I'm glad you've come here, Mr. Hood. But try to keep calm, will you, please?"

It was apparent to Wexford from the first that John Hood was in a different category of intelligence from that of Kingman and Corinne Last. He was a thickset man of perhaps no more than 27 or 28, with bewildered resentful blue eyes in a puffy flushed face. A man, Wexford thought, who would fling out rash accusations he couldn't substantiate, who would be driven to bombast and bluster in the company of the ex-teacher and that clever subtle woman.

He began to talk now, not wildly, but still without restraint, repeating what he had said to Burden, reiterating, without putting forward any real evidence, that his brother-in-law had meant to kill his sister that night. It was only by luck that she had survived. Kingman was a ruthless man who would have stopped at nothing to be rid of her. He, Hood, would never forgive himself that he hadn't made a stand and called the doctor.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Hood, but what exactly were your sister's symptoms?"

"Vomiting and stomach pains, violent pains," said Hood.

"She complained of nothing else?"

"Wasn't that enough? That's what you get when someone feeds you poisonous rubbish."

Wexford merely raised his eyebrows. Abruptly he left the events of that evening and said, "What had gone wrong with your sister's marriage?"

Before Hood replied, Wexford could sense he was keeping something back. A wariness came into his eyes and then was gone. "Axel wasn't the right person for her," he began. "She had problems, she needed understanding, she wasn't. . ." His voice trailed away.

"Wasn't what, Mr. Hood? What problems?"

"It's got nothing to do with all this," Hood muttered.

"I'll be the judge of that. You made this accusation, you started this business off. It's not for you now to keep anything back." On a sudden inspiration Wexford said, "Had these problems anything to do with the money she was spending?"

Hood was silent and sullen. Wexford thought rapidly over the

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things he had been told—Axel Kingman's fanaticism on one particular subject, Hannah's desperate need of an unspecified kind of support during the early days of her marriage, and later on, her alternating moods, then the money, the weekly sums of money spent and unaccounted for.

He looked up and said baldly, "Was your sister an alcoholic, Mr. Hood?"

(continued on page 118)

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

FELO DE SUE

by JOHN H. DIRCKX

Sam gave Sue some cider,
Which she put inside her.
Presently she died. Her
Maid identified her.
Poison was inside her—
Poison mixed with cider!
Was it suicide, or
Did Sam cyanide her?

Said Sam, " 'Twas suicide;
"I, too, was to have died."
In due course he was tried.
The jury, mystified
By double suicide
Where only one had died,
Decided Sam had lied,
And called it "Sueicide."

c 1977 by John H. Dirckx.

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a *NEW* short story by

MacLEAN O'SPELIN

One staff report on MacLean O'Spelin's newest story read: "An effective comment on the competitiveness in business and sports." And that it is—a deadly comment.

Gamesmanship, as Mr. Potter has revealed to us, can be a subtle weapon in the competitive world. But is there gamesmanship in the commission of crime? In the planning of a murder? Is there an insidious advantage in the game played for the highest possible stakes?

Now, meet two Executives on the Rise, dueling in the Corporate Jungle . . .

THAT CRUCIAL HALF STEP

by MacLEAN O'SPELIN

Golf can bring out the best in a man. Or the worst. It depends on whether he's happily on his game or agonizingly off it.

When a man is hacking around the course as if he'd never held a club in his hands before, his mood can grow murderous. And if, like me, he's an aficionado of mystery stories, he sympathizes with those villains who dispatched their victims on golf courses.

There have been several such tales. My favorite is Rex Stout's *Fer-de-Lance*. In fact it was from that first novel about Nero Wolfe that I drew the general concept of how I might defeat Matt Beechman.

Among many other things, Beechman was a fine golfer, a 4 handicapper. I was a 6.

He was an Executive on the Rise in our corporation. So was I. He was Vice-President, Policy. I was V-P, Production. Technically our ranks were equal. But the Policy boys always managed somehow to command a touch more of prestige than we Produc-

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tion people did. Wrongly, of course. But wrong-headed reality is still reality.

We were both fishermen, too. Fly fishermen. My record coho salmon taken on a fly was 13 lbs, 11 oz. His was 14 lbs, 7 oz.

Six double martinis never glazed Beechman's clear, sincere, blue gaze. Five I could handle, but six blurred my depth perception.

You see the pattern. It began to emerge three years ago in the office of I. T. Greavey, our company's Executive V-P. The President himself had hired me away from an eastern competitor—at a fat increase in salary and position—but Greavey, the stringy, sour, but able Number Two in the company, was my immediate boss.

Greavey, who, I learned, never let you forget he'd worked his way though Western Polytechnic, introduced me to my co-equal, Matt Beechman, adding with his thin smile, "Don't hold it against Courtney here that he's got culture—culture Harvard style, no less."

"Hell, no, I. T. The Ivy League turns out damn fine people." Beechman was about my height and his smile was big and warm. "Welcome aboard, Court. Be more than glad to show you the ropes."

And from then on he did. Almost adopted me in a way. "By God, I like you, Court," he said over lunch that day, his voice pleased and sincere.

And I liked him. Despite being a westerner, Matt Beechman was—well, a neo-Renaissance man. Versed in engineering, the fine arts, economics, sports, science, *haute cuisine*—you name it. I considered myself equally versed and thought myself amazingly lucky to have found a kindred soul in the corporate world of the Far West. Surprised, too, to be honest.

The first time he and I played golf, we played just for drinks at the nineteenth hole. Feeling each other out in a friendly way. A glorious, sunny day, my swing flowed smoothly, my putts dropped cleanly. It was a good match, a tight match. We came to the eighteenth tee all even.

"Been admiring your hand action," said Beechman with his engaging grin. "Reminds me of John Jacobs."

Gamesmanship. But not malicious, not unfair. He'd read his Stephen Potter, but his gamesmanship was never crude. Matt Beechman was tough-minded, true. But cheerfully so, honestly so.

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John Jacobs is British. A former playing pro who became an excellent and popular golf teacher and writer. Deservedly he's made an international name for himself. But some say his swing has the fatal British wristiness.

I have it, too. Acquired at Harvard? Who knows, but I fight it constantly. And after Beechman spotted it and indirectly called it to mind, I fought it there on the eighteenth hole. I fought too hard. I stiffened, hit my drive with the clubface open. Slice. I took a six, Beechman got his four. The sun went behind a cloud.

Now, losing that first match didn't drive me up any walls. If you're a six handicapper and the other fellow a four, he'll beat you more often than not even if he gives you a couple of strokes. So it was myself I was annoyed with, not Beechman. Gamesmanship is a fundamental of golf—I'd fallen into his little trap and had beaten myself. Fair enough. There'd be another day.

It never came. In theory, I should have beaten Beechman once in a while. In practice, never. Never.

Tennis, I figured, would be another matter. I'm neither left-handed nor anywhere near Rod Laver's class, but I model my game on his and I play excellent club tennis. Beechman, too, played excellent club tennis.

Ken Rosewall was his model. In the many Laver-Rosewall matches over the years, Laver, the topspin artist, has won oftener than that more classic stroker, Rosewall. Rosewall can and does win, but Laver has the long-run edge. So it should have been between Beechman and me.

Three times now we've met in the finals of our club's championship. Three times we've taken the match its full distance. Word got around that we always staged a battle that, if not epic, at least kept an audience in suspense and, last year, not only our wives and close friends but virtually the whole club turned out to watch us.

The day was cool but not cold. No wind. Hazy sun. Ideal for tennis. And, frankly, the tennis was as good as the weather. Back and forth went the ball. Back and forth went the lead.

With the sets all even and the games five each in the last set we met at the umpire's stand while changing sides. As I toweled sweat from my face, Beechman grinned. "Great match, eh, Court? Damn lucky for me you've quit blasting that Laver crosscourt out of nowhere the way you did in the first set. A little tired, probably—I know I am."

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Not subtle. But enough. That heavy topspin shot requires wrist action, plenty of it. So I snapped my wrist over with everything I had—four times running I snapped too soon. Four times running the ball dove unerringly into the net. 6-5 Beechman.

I'll say this: The next game I took him to deuce twice. But he held his serve, winning the final point on a blistering ace. Game, set, match, championship to Beechman. For the third straight time.

Wrists again. Maybe I should slash them, I thought grimly, as he jumped the net, hand outstretched in friendly triumph. Slash his wrists, not mine.

And so the thought was born. The germ of—murder.

And instantly suppressed. I wasn't the murderous type. Calmly confident, someone once wrote of me in a performance evaluation. Very ambitious—but who isn't? Talented. Personable. Good at my job.

A good adjectival summation of Beechman, too. Neither of us was a superman, but each was a good cut above the herd. Executives on the Rise. With Beechman always just that half step in front.

I never bear down on the Harvard motif. My accent is consciously faint. *Lampoon* is never conspicuously left on our cocktail table. I'm fully aware that there are some other fine schools. Still, Harvard gives a man a definable something that needs no puffery. Bluntly, it gives him an edge. Even in what some call the corporate jungle.

It was Executive V-P Greavey who showed me that educational background, like tennis and golf, can be affected by reverse spin.

"Matt's a Pacific State grad," Greavey said a week or so after I'd joined the company. "Local boy."

Who was making good, I thought. "Remarkably well educated, in the large sense of the word," I said. And instantly wished I hadn't.

Greavey eyed me stonily. "You're three thousand miles from all that ivy-covered culture now. Leave it there. You'll get along better that way."

So, in Greavey's view, Harvard put me one down to Beechman. I admit that I was surprised. Even mildly shocked.

At first I shrugged it off. After all, the company's President had sought *me* out. But as the months passed and it began to sink in

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that whichever way I turned there was Beechman just that crucial half step ahead, it rankled that his edge extended, unfairly, to alma maters.

I could have borne it if I'd detested the man. But I enjoyed his company. We thought alike—I relished the stimulation of our many shared interests. For example, Tracey, my wife, had presented me with several artist's proofs done by Albert Marquet, a particular favorite of mine. How could I help warming to a man, a westerner, who, on his first visit to our house with his wife, Nora, immediately identified the artist from clear across the room?

Springing to his feet, he crossed the room to examine the proofs closely. Spotting the *E. A.*'s penciled in by Marquet, he turned in delight to my wife. "*Epreuves de l'artiste.* By God, Tracey, a coup! It must've taken one helluva search to turn up such gems."

Her face lit up. Smiling, she came to me and kissed me lightly. "Just to please this gloomy creature I scoured Paris, Matt. For weeks."

And she had. How Beechman had guessed it, I didn't know. But it was typical of the intuitive skill he added to his many more tangible skills.

Later I found a small Matisse hanging in his house. Small, yes. But not a print, not a lithograph, not an artist's proof. An original oil.

Odd, in a way, that Matisse and Marquet were friends. Genuine friends. Interesting, maybe, that Matisse is considered the greater artist of the two. But not by me. And my affection and sympathy for Marquet grew after I discovered that Beechman owned an original Matisse. A damned *original!*

But it wasn't the relative merits of fine painters that triggered my decision to defeat Matt Beechman once and for all. It was a disloyal thought.

One day last summer we were playing mixed doubles and it struck me suddenly that Nora, Beechman's wife, had a better figure than my Tracey. Thighs more rounded, perhaps? Bosom fuller?

Nonsense. I loved Tracey as my life. Still . . . I doublefaulted twice and the Beechmans beat us again. Comic, almost. Or cosmic.

For God's sake, I told myself angrily, resolve this situation, do some executive decision-making. You've been searching for a

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vulnerable spot in Beechman's strengths through which to force a breakthrough, through which to thrust the tip of the spear. Find that weakness. Find that chink in his armor. But where?

Good question. My continuing hope had been that once I'd taken his measure at something, once the tip of the spear had penetrated, in a surge of confidence I could sweep my own strengths through the gap and conquer the man, conquer my obsession.

For obsession it had become. That evening over my martini, mixed and chilled to perfection by Tracey, I caught myself studying her. Comparing.

That was too much. Too damn much. Nora was pretty, yes. But my slender, elegant Tracey was matchless. Although . . .

The last straw. But I had yet to find Beechman's vulnerability. For me, perhaps, it might not exist. But that the poison of defeat should now infect my relationship with my beloved wife was intolerable. Beechman must be defeated. Fair means had failed me, so . . .

Recently I'd been rereading Rex Stout's *Fer-de-Lance*. Escaping from a real to a fictional golf course? Possibly. But I'm not psychoanalyzing myself, I'm explaining how I came to be constructing pieces of golfing equipment in the midst of deep mental turmoil. The Stout novel deals with murder on a golf course—and that's just what I now had in mind.

I made no secret of what I was up to. "Bob Jones dreamed up the perfect driver," I announced one drizzly afternoon in the barroom of the club. "Arnold Palmer constantly rebuilds his putter. Gene Sarazen invented the sand wedge. Why not me? Especially with this new shaft material, titanium, to tinker with?"

"Three golf geniuses. Plus you," said Beechman in friendly mockery. But there was a glint of interest behind his easy smile.

Good. Interest, curiosity were what I wanted. No golfer, living or maybe dead, can resist the seduction of a new design, a new material, a new theory.

Much trial and error went into the design, construction, and reconstruction. And much time. Curiously I found myself almost as engrossed by the engineering principles and the mechanical workings of the driver and the putter I eventually created as with those of the lethal weapon itself.

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The final results were excellent on all counts. The driver and the putter, of course, were simply the camouflage to cover the many lonely night hours I spent in the company's workshops building the weapon that would dispose of Beechman. My fer-de-lance, the tip of my spear . . .

But, by the ghost of Harry Vardon, the driver and the putter turned out to be works of art. At a driving range the driver worked as if it were part of me. On the Isfahan rugs in our living room the putter never missed.

And the prosaic-looking ball retriever that was to be my fer-de-lance spat its deadly venom as quickly and quietly as its namesake. For the fer-de-lance (*Bothrops atrox*) is, like its cousin the copperhead, a swift, silent, and efficient killer.

But driving ranges and Isfahan rugs aren't the same as a golf course. The driver and the putter might not perform so handsomely there. Still, I couldn't suppress a burst of new confidence. Never mind the golf clubs. It was the telescoping steel tube, the already existing spring-loaded mechanism of the ball retriever that I'd meticulously modified which had to work flawlessly.

I tested and retested. Perfect.

When, in early spring, Beechman and I went steelheading, I half expected my reborn confidence to carry me through to triumph. Using an eastern fly pattern, a Supervisor, I hooked, fought, and landed a bright silver eleven-pounder. Using a local pattern, a Yellow Hammer, Beechman brought in the gleaming steelhead buck of twelve and one-quarter pounds. That soul-searing half step ahead—again.

My confidence ebbed. But not completely. Nor did my resolve weaken. If anything, it intensified.

Our corporation's annual Golf Frolic, I had decided, was ideal for the debut of my new equipment. And ideal for the defeat, the demise, of Matt Beechman.

The Frolic is a dreary funless affair that all the hackers and twice-a-year golfers in the company attend. But participation is compulsory for Executives on the Rise. This time, I thought with grim humor, the event would prove memorable.

The poison. For obvious reasons I won't record precisely which poison I obtained or how. But I will say this: my company has drug and chemical subdivisions, and I was Vice-President in charge of Production. One way or another, then, I got exactly what I needed.

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For the Golf Frolic, Beechman always teamed with I. T. Greavey and I with our President. It's the one time I beat Beechman—but the one time I can't count.

It's politic for our President to win. Not the grand prize of the Frolic, of course, but our private match. Beechman and Greavey knew this just as well as I did, so our match was always close but its outcome was predestined.

The day was all it should be. Sunny and warm. Flowers, bees—everything traditional to the month of May. And, also per tradition, the President led off. As usual, his swing was a bit loose, a tad erratic, but his drive from the first tee was respectable enough. I hit a beauty, 250-plus yards and as straight as if plotted by surveyor's transit. "Some driver," I said and waggled the new club appreciatively.

Greavey's swing was flat and slightly wooden but controlled and his drive was adequate, close to 185. Beechman's was solid, about 235. Outdriving him today meant little because he'd be holding back. But I was pleased nonetheless.

I outdrove him four holes running and several times caught him eyeing my new driver. I outputted him too—the new putter swinging along a perfect groove that seemed almost built-in.

By the seventh hole it looked as if the match was a runaway and my partner, the President, was beaming. Beechman had stopped holding back on his shots, but I'd gone right on outdriving and outputting him.

"By God, Matt," I said on the eighth tee, "maybe I am a club-design genius. These new ones I built are damn near magical. Here, try the driver, see if it works for you."

He studied me a moment. "No, thanks, Court." Then his easy smile. "Hell, man, it's who's swinging the clubs, not who makes 'em that counts. I've got your number, old buddy, and you know it."

Maybe not today, I thought. And hope, that undying hope that golfers and fishermen exist on, surged within me. Could it be? Had my long hours of work and rapt concentration in the company's workshops resulted in clubs that touched a submerged wellspring of confidence and talent in me?

The ninth was a water hole, requiring a medium carry over a pond from the tee. I'd planned to use the deadly ball retriever and the poisoned dart it shot at this hole, flubbing my own tee shot into the water if one of the other three didn't oblige.

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None of them did. Neither did I. I simply couldn't bring myself to dunk one purposely with my beautiful new driver.

A different hope began to stir in me. The hope that here on the golf course, on Golf Frolic day, I was about to truly defeat Beechman. Without resort to artificial means, without resort to my painstakingly built, venom-loaded fer-de-lance.

I'd prefer it that way. Not that I had any deep compunction about disposing of Beechman. He was my friend, a kindred, like-thinking soul, true. But he was destroying my life. It was a simple question of survival.

When I ran in another long putt on the thirteenth hole, the match was won. The President and I had closed out our opponents, 6 up and 5 to play. And they had been playing their hearts out. They intended to lose, yes, but not to be humiliated.

Striding along the fourteenth fairway in the wake of another of my perfect drives, I made the decision to give Beechman a reprieve. Although my outplaying him today wasn't conclusive, it was a definite signpost. I could afford a few more weeks of testing, of establishing once and for all that he'd no longer be that confidence-shattering half step ahead.

The fourteenth is another water hole. The green sits on a slight rise tightly behind the arm of a small artificial lake. Your approach shot had better be right on the money.

I. T. Greavey's wasn't. Splash.

The rest of us sympathized audibly if not too sincerely. "Brand-new ball," he groused.

Good, I thought uncharitably, as we all peered into the shallow water where the white ball rested, tantalizingly out of reach.

"Partner, that cost you a penalty stroke but it won't cost you a new ball, too," said Beechman and before I could react he had the ball retriever out of my golf bag and was fully extending it.

I held my breath. Naturally I'd designed the gadget so it would perform its normal function of clutching the ball in the metal fingers at its business end when Beechman actuated the lever on its handle. Still, handy gadget or not, it was also loaded with a lethal dart. And accidents do happen.

Neatly, though, he fished out the ball, retracted the steel fingers, and deposited the wet ball on the grass at Greavey's feet.

"Good rig," Beechman said to me as he began telescoping the retriever down to its normal length. "You make this, too?"

I said yes and watched tensely as he examined it closely. He

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might be V-P, Policy, but he was no stranger to engineering and mechanics.

He looked up. Immediately I read his thoughts.

A few yards away Greavey was now addressing his ball and the President was watching him, so what my friend Beechman and I had at that moment was what you might call a period of silent, intimate communion.

As with so many mutual interests, he shared my addiction to mystery tales. And I could tell that he remembered the classic tales of death on various fictional golf courses. And I could tell that his intuition and his expert's eye had divined the purpose and mechanical details of my carefully crafted murder weapon.

This time his smile was fleeting and rueful, not cheery. Then I saw something I'd never noticed before: icy calculation.

He glanced again at the ball retriever he still held, then turned his head to watch I. T. Greavey hit a graceless but workable shot that wound up on the front fringe of the green.

Beechman looked back at me, gestured slightly with the ball retriever in the President's direction, and raised his eyebrows questioningly. Challengingly.

Again I instantly read his mind. And understood the challenge. If the presidency were vacant, I. T. Greavey was a reasonably good bet to fill the vacancy. Then either Matt Beechman or I would step up into Greavey's old slot.

"Little short but not too bad, Greavey," I heard the President say as he and our Executive V-P started to move on toward the green.

I shook my head at Beechman in negation.

He grinned and said softly, "Just a thought."

I made my decision. Just as softly I said, "The other one."

His grin vanished. I watched him analyze what I was suggesting. Removing Greavey instead of the President would eliminate the chance, which was real, that the Board of Directors might bring in an outsider to fill the vacant presidency—in which event Beechman and I would have gained absolutely nothing.

But if Greavey's position were vacated, it was a virtual certainty that one of us would move into the plush office of the Executive Vice-President.

Beechman would figure, since he was always that half step ahead of me, that all the odds were on his side.

He made his decision as swiftly as I had. Once again my heart

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warmed to a man whose tastes, attitudes, and talents so closely resembled my own.

With one smooth movement he swung the ball retriever through a shallow arc, pressed the hidden trigger that fired the dart from my dual-purpose gadget, and dropped the retriever back into my golf bag.

Greavey stopped in mid-stride, clapped a hand to the back of his neck, and began hopping awkwardly around as if trying to evade a swarm of yellowjackets. "Damn bees, that's the second time this month . . ."

Again we sympathized with him and we soothed him and, as we did, I picked up the dart from where it lay on the ground and slipped it into my pocket. I'd fashioned it to look like an ordinary wooden golf tee and by the time I. T. Greavey suffered his fatal heart stricture we'd all be having drinks at the nineteenth hole and the tee-dart would be safely tucked away among the dozens of normal tees in my golf bag.

My Marquet proofs are going to look fine on the wall of the Executive V-P's office. No, they're not there yet. But they will be.

Matt Beechman had made his decision too swiftly.

It is the President who selects the Executive V-P. And the President, when he hired me, had said, "Court, what our company needs is a touch of class, a sprig of ivy. Not a whole vine, you understand, just a sprig in high places to pull in more of that eastern business we need so much."

Well, I was that sprig. I was the President's fair-haired boy. And I was the golf partner who'd helped him win the annual match four times running. As they say out here, I was a shoo-in.

Oh, I'll keep a weather eye on my friend Matt Beechman. I still like him. And we have one more thing in common these days. An interest in gadgetry, you might call it. But I'll keep a wary eye on him.

There's no guarantee he won't come up with an idea for a lethal gadget of his own.

I'm not worried, though. The tip of my spear, my fer-de-lance, pierced I. T. Greavey's tough hide. And, indirectly, it found and pierced the chink in Beechman's armor.

I'm the one who has now forged ahead that crucial half step.

The corporate jungle. An exaggeration, of course. But there is this: the fer-de-lance is, undeniably, a creature of the jungle.

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a *NEW* Lovell and Lang story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

Hail the return of Lang and Lovell, the outside man and the inside man, and the cleverest art forgers of our time . . . The essence of a con game, the essential ingredient of a scam, is greed—on both sides . . .

LANG AND LOVELL GO LEGIT

by *ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS*

As always as I came in, I stopped for a moment out on the street to admire the display window with the neat gold lettering down in the lower left corner: *L and L Galleries–Showings by Appointment.* It was the first thing of any permanence I'd ever owned and even after all these months I still couldn't quite get over it.

This morning, though, I had company. A bulky man in a gray suit that was just a little too small for his shoulders stood in front of the window, frowning as if he couldn't quite figure it out either. But then he spotted me and his face broke out in a slow malicious grin. I remembered the grin well. Him too. His name was Peterson. He was a detective sergeant assigned to Fraud-Bunco, and needless to say most of our prior meetings hadn't been all that pleasant. For either of us.

"Well, well," he said, "as I live and breathe, Harry Lang." His smile turned almost happy. "They told me I'd find something interesting if I came down here and I sure did. What's the scam this time, Harry? Or do I have to ask?"

"No scam," I said. "I'm a legitimate businessman. I even pay taxes."

"On an art gallery?" His voice was heavy.

"Why not?"

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"A better question is why? What do you know about art anyway?"

"More than you might think," I said. "And anyway I have a partner to handle that end of it. I just take care of the business and selling part."

"I'll bet you do," Peterson said. He tapped me twice on the shoulder. "Well, you just keep it legit, because after all these years I'd sure hate like hell to haul you in."

"Sure you would," I said. "That's why you came running down here," and watched his back disappear around the corner.

Lovell was waiting for me inside the gallery, even more ready than usual to bounce up to the ceiling at the slightest provocation. Even at the best of times Lovell is as jumpy as a cat in a roomful of fox terriers. He is also an absolute nut about the kind of food he will allow himself to eat. More importantly, though, from the partnership standpoint, he is also an artist with a very great if somewhat specialized talent.

He can forge the work of any artist living or dead and do it so well that even the original artist himself would be hard put to tell the difference, and it was by exploiting that talent that we earned enough money to buy the gallery and go legitimate—or as legitimate, anyway, as anybody trying to break into the art business can afford to be these days.

Now, as he saw me come in, Lovell blinked twice and swallowed hard. "You're late," he said.

"Unavoidable delay," I said. "Our old friend from Fraud-Bunco, Sergeant Peterson, was outside nosing around."

"Oh, lord," Lovell said. He actually wrung his hands. "Why today?"

"Any reason why *not* today?"

Lovell nodded. "Mr. Vincent called," he said. "Finally. He's coming over this afternoon for a private showing. If he sees a cop—"

"We'll tell him he's here to guard the premises," I said. "Don't worry. It couldn't be better." And with that I left him still blinking and went back to my office to get ready for the day.

I'd been angling to get Vincent into the gallery almost since we'd opened it, and to be sure I didn't muff it I set the showing up in a small room just off the main gallery, placing the paintings he had come to see one at a time on a single easel. There were eight

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in all, watercolors mostly, depicting scenes around the artist's native White Mountains. They weren't everybody's cup of tea, but Vincent seemed to like them. He sat in the room's only chair, nodding only to indicate when he was ready for the next.

"Lovely," he said at last. He was a tall lean man with a long aristocratic face and a deceptively languid air. His family was one of the oldest in this part of the country, but by the time he'd come along there was little left to inherit except the name. Before he was 30, though, he'd made the name a force to be reckoned with in the then-booming electronics field.

He'd spent the next ten years milking it for all it was worth, then had sold out at enormous profit just before the bust and settled down to lead the life his upbringing had prepared him for—which included, of course, patronizing the arts. Considering the size and scope of the collection he had built up, just getting him into the gallery was a minor triumph.

"Lovely," he said again. "What's the provenance?"

"They're from the Dieckmann estate," I said. "The widow has to sell to meet the inheritance taxes. Otherwise they would have gone to the Art Institute with the rest of the collection."

"Of course," Vincent said. He looked at the painting instead of me. "Quite a coup your landing them," he said, "instead of one of the more established galleries."

I nodded agreement. "Yes, it was, and frankly the only way I could do it was to offer to rebate half of my commission."

Vincent raised an elegant eyebrow. "To Mrs. Dieckmann?"

I shook my head. "To her attorney," I said. I shrugged. "I don't like it, but—well, you have to do a lot of things you don't like when you're trying to get a business established."

Vincent smiled faintly; it was a subject he knew something about. "Yes, I suppose you do." He looked back at the painting on the easel. "Although," he murmured, "sometimes private arrangements can be worked out that even attorneys don't know about—if the price is right."

"I know," I said, "but unfortunately in this case the contract specifies a public auction."

"Too bad," Vincent said in the same soft voice. He looked as if he intended to say more, but before he got the chance the door from the main gallery opened and a short dumpy woman in a green print dress and short scruffy topcoat stuck her head into the room. She looked 50 if a day and carried a flat, brown-paper-

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wrapped package under her arm as if it were a shield.

"Hey," she said, "either of you two work here?"

Vincent looked at her with mild curiosity.

"How about it?" the woman said. "I've been looking all over and there's not a soul in the joint."

"It's not a joint," I said. "It's an art gallery and this is a private showing. You—"

She ignored me and went on speaking to Vincent. "Look," she said, "I won't take a minute. I just want to ask a question."

Without waiting for a response she started ripping the paper off her package, revealing a painting about a foot high by a foot and a half long. It was a landscape of some sort, but details were hard to make out because the entire surface was covered with blotches of varying hues and densities.

Vincent made a face. "Good lord," he said, "what did you do? Pour ink over it?"

The woman shuffled apologetically. "It was stored under some blankets in an attic," she said, "but the roof leaked and the colors ran. It wasn't me that did it," she added. "It was my sister. She didn't really care for it. She only took it to keep me from having it. You know how that is."

"Yes," I said. "Mrs.—?"

"Ferris," the woman said. "Anyway, after she finally did give it to me, somebody said maybe you could do something about cleaning it up. I don't want to pay too much if I don't have to, but my father brought it back from France after World War One and I grew up with it and I would like to have it back like it used to be if I could."

"I understand," I said, easing her back toward the door, "but that's really something you have to talk to my partner about. If you'll just go down the hallway until you come to the girl at the desk, she'll see that you're taken care of."

I closed the door after her and turned back to Vincent. He raised an eyebrow inquisitively.

"It's like I told you," I said. "You have to do a lot of things you don't like when you're trying to get a business established."

He laughed.

When he had finally seen enough of the paintings he had come for, I took him out through the rear exit past my office. Mrs. Ferris had apparently just finished her business and gone, because Lovell was still standing beside the secretary's desk looking down

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ruefully at the blotched painting.

"You haven't met my partner, have you?" I said to Vincent.

"No," he said. They shook hands.

"I see you accepted our insistent caller's challenge," Vincent said, looking down at the painting himself and grimacing again. "You have your work cut out for you."

"Not really," Lovell said. Jumpy as he is, the quality of his work is still the one thing you can't shake him on. "There's a coat of varnish over the paint. All I have to do is clean the mess off that and revarnish. Then a little wood filler where they cracked the stretcher nailing it to the frame and the whole thing will be as good as new. Maybe even better."

"I'm sure it will be," Vincent said. He began pulling on his gloves, smoothing them out carefully one finger at a time. "About those watercolors," he said to me, "you won't forget to notify me when the auction is to be held."

"Of course not," I said as if it was the farthest thing from my mind.

As it turned out, though, there wasn't any auction. The lawyer handling the Dieckmann estate called less than a week later to withdraw the watercolors from sale. I wasn't too surprised. Vincent hadn't got where he was by missing any tricks. He'd simply gone around me to make his own deal with the attorney, picking up the paintings for a good deal less—even counting the kickback—than they'd have gone for at auction. I could afford to write it off, though, and in any case I hadn't seen the last of Vincent. Or, for that matter, of Mrs. Ferris.

She was back shortly after the first of the following month, carrying the same flat, wrapped package under her arm. This time, though, she wasn't alone. Peterson came with her.

"I'm disappointed in you, Harry," he said. "You told me you'd gone legitimate and I told you to keep it that way. And then what's the next thing I hear but that you've gone right back to your old tricks."

"Oh?" I said. "And just what am I supposed to be doing?"

"You know darn good and well what you're doing," Mrs. Ferris burst in. "I left a valuable painting here for your partner to clean up and now the two of you are trying to steal it."

"Oh, come on," I said. "You got your painting back—and in better shape than you brought it in."

"That's what you say," she said. "I say I got *a* picture back but

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not the same one I brought in. And don't try to tell me it just looks different because it's been cleaned. You might fool most people that way, but I used to study that picture for hours when I was a girl and this one *is* different.

"That's not all either. After she saw it all cleaned up, my sister started talking about how we ought to have it appraised. It was just her way of trying to get it back, but anyway I took it over to one of the professors at the university who's supposed to know about these things. And, boy, did he get excited when he saw it. He even got a book out to show me what it was—one of the lost landscapes by a painter named Augustus Milverton.

"It seems this Milverton didn't get famous until after he died, which was around 1930 or so, and by then a lot of his paintings had disappeared, because he'd been selling them off to everybody and anybody just for money to live. Anyway, that's the kind of painting he said I had. But then he ran some tests just to make sure and afterwards he said he was sorry but he'd been wrong. All I had was a copy done in this Milverton's style. Which sort of made sense because my father hadn't paid very much for it even if he did always say he'd bought it from the painter himself. It could have been the painter who made the copy.

"But afterwards I got to thinking. Why would somebody make a copy of another artist's picture twelve or fifteen years *before* that other artist got famous. It didn't make sense. And that's when I really began to realize something funny was going on, and it had to be you that was doing it because the only time that painting's been out of my family's hands was when you had it. So I want my picture back."

"I don't have your picture," I said.

"Then I want the money it's worth—or I want you in jail."

"What about it, Harry?" Peterson said.

I shrugged. "It's her word against mine," I said. "If you want to go to the State's Attorney with that, be my guest. But I think we both know what his reaction will be."

"Yeah," Peterson said, "except maybe it isn't just her word against yours." He smiled his tight, happy little malicious smile. "Mrs. Ferris says there was another man here when she brought in her picture besides you and your partner—and that he'll back her up that this one she has now is different."

"That's ridiculous."

"You mean there wasn't another man?" Peterson said quietly.

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"No, there was all right. But he saw that painting for less than a minute. He's not going to be able to tell you anything. He won't thank you either if you go wasting his time."

Peterson's face turned beet-red. "You ought to know better than that, Harry," he said. "I don't waste people's time—not when I'm conducting an official investigation. So who was he? And don't think you can run in a ringer. Mrs. Ferris will recognize him when she sees him even if she never did hear his name."

I hesitated, then shrugged. "Arthur Vincent," I said. "He lives over on Belmont Terrace."

"Fine," Peterson said, smiling again. "So why don't we just run over there and see what he can or can't tell us?"

"You mean right now?"

"Why not?" Peterson said. He pointed his finger at me. "You may be just as legitimate as you say—now. But I remember you from the bad old days and the only way I can be sure you won't hop on the phone like a bunny to tell Mr. Vincent just what to say is to take you along. Any objections?"

"No. Of course not."

"Fine," Peterson said again. "Get your hat then."

Taking no chances, Peterson left me out in the car with a police driver while he and Mrs. Ferris went up to Vincent's apartment. It was a long half hour. Finally, though, they came back out. Peterson looked grim, Mrs. Ferris agitated.

"They're in it together," she was saying. "They have to be."

"Sure," Peterson said. He pulled the car door open and jerked his thumb up. "Out," he said. He meant me.

"I don't expect an apology," I said, "but you could at least take me back where you found me."

"Out!" Peterson said again.

I got out. They both got in, Peterson moving the other cop over so he could drive himself. I closed his door for him. He didn't say anything, but he left a half inch of rubber on the street.

I waited until they were out of sight, then went over into the building and rode the elevator up to Vincent's apartment. It filled the entire top floor, but Vincent himself answered my ring. He was wearing a pale-gray dressing gown with a scarf at the throat.

"I just wanted to say I'm sorry," I said. "I tried to prevent their coming but I'm afraid Peterson wasn't in a mood to listen."

Vincent smiled. "No, he wasn't, was he?" he said. "But do come in. I was just about to call you anyway."

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He closed the door after me and moved back into the room, leaving me to follow.

"An unfortunate situation," he said. "One can't help but feel sorry for the poor woman—although I must admit I told her that since she had failed to register the painting with the International Art Registry or any of the other identification services, however much logic might be on her side she really stood very little chance of proving that the painting she had now wasn't the same one she'd had before. I trust you appreciate that."

"Well, of course," I said, "but under the circumstances there really wasn't much else you could say."

"Wasn't there?" Vincent said. He smiled faintly. "I won't pretend I remember the painting in any detail," he said, "but I do remember your partner's remark about repairing some cracks in the stretcher with wood filler. So naturally I checked the stretcher on the painting that poor Mrs. Ferris showed me this afternoon. And what to my surprise did I find? An absence of cracks of any kind, repaired or otherwise.

"I suppose you could argue that you simply replaced the stretcher. But that would seem to be a lot of trouble and expense for a relatively worthless painting. Unless, of course, it wasn't so worthless."

He looked at me searchingly. "Opportunities like that are rare, aren't they, Mr. Lang, and when they come along they're much too good to pass up. It was an original Milverton, wasn't it? And you did switch pictures on her."

"You're quite a detective," I said. "Why didn't you tell all this to Peterson and Mrs. Ferris?"

Vincent's smile broadened. "Because, like you, Mr. Lang, I'm not one to let such a golden opportunity pass. I want the painting. I won't rob you, of course. Shall we say $15,000 just to insure that the deal remains our secret?"

"That's less than one-third of what it's worth," I said.

"True," Vincent said. "But I suggest you take it. Otherwise I might have to call Mrs. Ferris—and that detective—and explain what I had just 'remembered.' "

He looked at me blandly until finally I shrugged. "I'll want the money in cash," I said.

"Of course," Vincent said. "Just as soon as the painting's delivered." He escorted me to the door. "Shall we say this afternoon? I find the sooner these affairs are settled the better."

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"So do I," I said, and left.

When I got back to the gallery Mrs. Ferris was waiting for me in my office. She sat behind my desk, eating an apple and looking very much at home. She tossed the core into my wastebasket. "How did it go?" she said.

"Fine, Maude," I said. "Just fine." I opened the wall safe and got out her money. "$1000," I said, handing it to her, "as agreed. You can count it if you like."

"Naw," she said. "You wouldn't cheat me." She stuffed the money into her purse. "There is one thing, though, if you don't mind my asking. Why did you go to all this trouble just to unload that painting? What I mean is, I appreciate the money and the chance to earn it, but if that picture was as good a fake as you said it was, why didn't you just stick it up on the wall and let somebody buy it legitimately?"

"Provenance," I said.

"Huh?"

"Too many people have been stung buying phony paintings in the past," I said, "and everybody knows it. So the smart collectors—the ones with the big money—won't buy anything these days until they've checked and double-checked where it came from and who owned it before back to the year one—unless, of course," I added, smiling, "you offer them a deal that's just too good to pass up."

DETECTIVERSE

AVANT-GARDE

by MARK GRENIER

A counterfeit portrait clinches the con,
Once the sucker is set to be bled.
Lang gets the credit for leading him on,
But it's Lovell who forges a head.

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a *NEW* short story by

NEDRA TYRE

Little Jenny was lame. Her spindly left leg dragged and she wore a brace on it. Being partly crippled was a great handicap to a seven-year-old girl. You wouldn't think an even greater burden could be put on her . . .

THE DOWER CHEST

by NEDRA TYRE

Every afternoon Jenny's one wish was to get back to the dower chest. Somehow it was as if getting back to the dower chest would be getting back to her grandmother's house in the country. Especially during recess she longed to see the chest again.

Part of school she was crazy about and part of it she hated. Lessons were fun and easy. Recess was awful. When the recess bell sounded she wanted to run outside like the other children, but of course she couldn't run. That was the trouble. If she could only have flung her left leg away from her, but it dragged when she wanted to get into the swing and soar. Not only couldn't she swing but her crippled leg wouldn't allow her to balance on the seesaw.

When she stood alone on her third day at school, the playground aide came over with a smile like a Smiley, took her by the hand, and said she must come play dodgeball. At his urging she got into the ring and was the first one put out.

At the end of the school day the teacher suggested Jenny leave first and she was no more than out the door and a few steps down the hall when the other children emerged and shoved and jostled her as they rushed past.

The mothers were clustered outside, tiptoeing and peering into the mass of escaping children to find their own, and they paired off even though some of the children ignored their mothers and

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pretended not to know them. Other mothers and children grabbed for each other as if they had been apart for a hundred years. No matter how the mothers and children were reunited they left the grounds quickly and Jenny was once more alone.

To try to get her breath after keeping her leg out of the way of the darting children, she stood on her good leg and thought of the day's classes. There wasn't a subject she didn't like. She couldn't have chosen a favorite if her life depended on it. That was a silly way to describe how she felt, but it was how her Aunt Ellen would have said it. "If my life depended on it, I couldn't choose between your cinnamon cake and your apple brown Betty," Aunt Ellen would say to Jenny's grandmother.

Jenny missed Aunt Ellen and her grandmother terribly. She wished she could be with them now instead of on the deserted school grounds. Other children were far ahead, walking on the street that led to where Jenny lived, and even those who loitered had disappeared long before she could get to the crossing.

The policeman at the crossing was nice. Maybe he wasn't a policeman. She thought he was called a school guard. Anyway, he wore a uniform and was friendly. "I don't like it, Jenny," he said every day. "Somebody should meet you." She explained there wasn't anybody who could meet her because her mother worked until the store closed at 5:30. That didn't mollify him. "With all the cars around here," he insisted, "somebody could give you a ride home." But it was a one-way street and the cars didn't go in the direction of her apartment house.

He told her to call him Sam. He would lift her high so that she floated across the street and her pencils and books spilled and they both laughed.

After Sam had swung her across the street he would say, "Give us a wave, Jenny," and she knew he watched her. She hated for people to watch her walk. It was awful to be stared at and to know someone was looking as she tried to sling her lame foot from behind her to in front of her. In her first days at school some of the children had pulled her dress up to see how her brace was fastened and she had wanted to die from shame.

But she didn't really mind being watched by Sam. She would turn around and wave at him at frequent intervals and they would keep on exchanging waves, and he would seem to grow smaller and smaller. And then they would give each other a last prolonged wave and she would turn the corner and enter the

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apartment house.

She should have been happy then because she was so near the dower chest, but the long dark hall frightened her. Every afternoon as the days shortened and the shadows grew longer she became more afraid. The doors on each side of the corridor were shut tight, but she had a feeling that a door would suddenly burst open and someone would grab her and jerk her inside or, worse still, that someone would stalk out into the hall and order her to stop making all that noise clomping and ask why she didn't walk like an ordinary person.

Then with all the fear rushing after her she would turn to the left into a narrow hall, and that threatened her even more because she was so near her own apartment where her toys were and where everything looked so pretty, even though it was dark and the walls needed painting and the plumbing often made such funny wheezing noises that she and her mother would get stitches from laughing at it.

Even when she got inside the apartment Jenny would still be a little scared. But more than being scared she was homesick for her grandmother's house where she had lived all her life until these last few weeks when she and her mother had moved to Kingborough. She would think of the cats and the birdies and the two dogs and her own little corner of the flower garden.

Then she would look at the big dower chest which seemed so overgrown and large and out of place in the tiny living room, and she wished she could climb into it and lie there until someone came and took her and her mother and the beautiful chest back to the country where they belonged.

Aunt Ellen was the one who had urged them to move. In a way Jenny loved her great-aunt more than anybody in the world because somehow she knew she didn't really have to love her. She had to love her mother and grandmother and she did, most awfully, but Aunt Ellen was different. She and Jenny's grandmother owned the farm and they had all lived there—Jenny and her parents, grandmother and Aunt Ellen.

Aunt Ellen taught Jenny because there was no school nearby. She taught Jenny to read and write and was so happy when Jenny could repeat a poem word-perfect, and she read Jenny myths (for a long time Jenny was afraid that Ulysses would never get back to Penelope) and *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* and she taught her how to knit. She showed Jenny how to blow huge

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iridescent bubbles through empty thread spools, and every Friday she baked Jenny a gingerbread man with raisins for eyes and buttons, and in between gingerbread men she would bake small biscuits. Aunt Ellen had taught her some of the multiplication tables and how to read music and how to predict weather (red at night, sailor's delight; red in the morning, sailor's warning) and shell peas and string beans and tell when fudge was done.

Even though the dower chest was much too huge for their apartment Jenny was glad her mother had insisted on bringing it. It was the one piece of furniture her mother had taken to the country house when she had gone there as a bride to live with her husband and mother-in-law. The lid of the chest was so heavy Jenny couldn't lift it, and the chest rested on a platform painted like the chest, with birds and flowers in deep colors.

Sometimes when Jenny first entered the apartment after school and looked at the chest in the shadows, it reminded her of her father's coffin. The coffin and the chest were the only two large boxes with heavy lids she had ever seen.

Jenny remembered when her father died that her grandmother had wept beside his coffin and her mother was upstairs weeping in the bedroom as she stood near the dower chest and looked out to the apple orchard. Later Aunt Ellen had led Jenny to the coffin in the parlor. Behind the coffin were great wreaths and vases of beautiful flowers. Jenny loved flowers, but the lilies in the parlor smelled too sweet and made her sneeze.

Aunt Ellen had said Jenny's father was inside the coffin and he must have been for he wasn't around any more, not since the police had telephoned he had been killed when his car crashed. But it didn't look much like him, especially with his eyes closed. His eyes had bothered Jenny. He would look at her spindly leg and the brace and a strange expression would come over his face as if he didn't believe what he saw, and sometimes he would deliberately not glance at her leg, as if not looking at it would make it disappear.

And it was funny how Jenny tried to go along with his pretense that her leg was all right. She tried not to walk when she was around him and she would wait in a room for him to leave, hoping she wouldn't have to walk in his presence because her leg was so distasteful to him. She didn't feel that way at all with her mother and grandmother and Aunt Ellen.

Some weeks after the funeral Aunt Ellen said, "Anne and

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Jenny can't stay here and wither away." She turned to grandmother. "Your son didn't leave them anything to live on. Besides the child's got to go to a real school. I've exhausted my knowledge just teaching her the multiplication tables through the fours, and I've always had trouble with the alphabet once I got past *m*."

Her grandmother was quick to object. "I'll bet Jenny is the only seven-year-old in the county who can recite 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' without a mistake."

Jenny winced. She wished her grandmother wouldn't call her a seven-year-old because next month she would be eight.

"It's a lopsided education I've given her," Aunt Ellen went on. "Besides, Jenny needs to be with children and Anne ought to have a career—or at least a job. I know what I'm talking about."

"You know so much," grandmother said, "I expect any minute for them to summon you to Washington to run the country."

"I think we're being thrown out, Jenny," her mother had said. They had all laughed.

A few days later Jenny's mother kissed them all goodbye and went to Kingborough to look for a job and an apartment.

She was back in a week. "The apartment is a real dump," she said. "You can't imagine how high the rents are. But it's on the first floor and Jenny won't have to climb stairs and it's near a bus stop, so I can get to work easily, and near a primary school and grocery store."

The job her mother had found was handling complaints in a department store.

Jenny didn't want to leave. She couldn't bear to go away. But she didn't say so and the moving men came for the dower chest and the furniture grandmother made them take. "We won't miss it," she said. "We're furniture proud. It would be a favor for you to take it off our hands. You're welcome to the car, too." But Grandmother and Aunt Ellen would have been lost in the country without their car, so Jenny's mother wouldn't hear of taking it. Anyway, the moving men were giving them a ride to Kingborough.

Aunt Ellen had waved a last goodbye and Jenny had hopped down the front steps. Her grandmother and mother were at the front door. As one of the moving men lifted Jenny and swung her into the cab of the van, Jenny heard her grandmother say, "I love you, Anne. I loved my son. I wish I could have helped make him a better husband for you."

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One afternoon after school Jenny's terror became real. What she had been afraid of happened in the hall outside her apartment.

A door opened suddenly and a tall woman grabbed her. Jenny's good leg teetered and her bad leg whirled around her.

"I want to leave Eddie with you for a few minutes," the woman said. "I've got to go to the store and I can't take him. I'll be right back."

The woman had thrust a very small boy toward Jenny. She didn't know what to do with him. But she needn't have worried as he just yawned, curled up on the rug, and went to sleep.

The woman didn't stay away very long. Soon she knocked sharply on the door. She didn't have any groceries or packages with her. She just said, "I've come for Eddie." She didn't even thank Jenny.

Once the door closed on Eddie and his mother, Jenny had the feeling she had escaped from something unbearably terrifying. It was the feeling she had when she read a scary story and was glad the story was in a book and not something real and true.

Of course she must tell her mother, but that night her mother said when she got home from work, "Woman to woman, Jenny, I've had a ghastly day. I want to take a long hot bath. Will you forgive me if supper is late?" Her mother had stayed in the bathroom for more than an hour and then she had fixed shrimp creole, one of Jenny's favorite dishes. But her mother hadn't eaten anything at all, and Jenny knew the bath hadn't helped very much. Her mother didn't feel well and it wouldn't be fair to tell her about Eddie and his mother.

The next afternoon the hall was empty and instead of being frightened by the emptiness as she usually was, Jenny felt comforted by it, and when she approached her own door she tried to tiptoe. Before she knew it the tall woman appeared with Eddie. "I have homework to do," Jenny said, "and lots of chores. Besides I haven't asked my mother's permission to stay with your little boy."

When Jenny opened her door, the woman thrust Eddie inside. "It's not everybody would want to play with you," she said, "not with a crippled leg like that. You ought to be glad my little boy is too young to mind."

Eddie sobbed and howled. His mother slapped him. "You'd better be good, young man," she said, "or this little girl will put you

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in that big box and close the lid and that will be the end of you."

As soon as his mother slammed the door, Eddie stopped crying. He had brought no toys and he was too little to play any of Jenny's games, and she didn't want to trust her dolls and stuffed animals with him. She gave him a crayon and he rushed toward her grandmother's light-blue velvet loveseat. Jenny got to him just in time to snatch the crayon from his hand before he smeared the upholstery. She tried to soothe him by reading him *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle,* but he wouldn't stay still and he tore a page from the book.

After those first two afternoons a man joined the woman and they both waited in the hall for Jenny.

She couldn't understand why they thrust Eddie on her. Since there were two of them they could look after Eddie. If the woman had to go to the store or do some other errand, she could leave Eddie with the man.

The man and woman acted as if they were the only people in the world, the way they looked at each other and giggled and shoved Eddie on Jenny, and what was so funny was that Eddie really didn't want to come with her. He pulled back. The man was so eager to get rid of Eddie that he snatched the key from Jenny and unlocked her door, and the woman pushed Eddie inside and told him to behave or he would be put into the big box with the lid shut. And when Eddie broke away and rushed down the hall the woman dragged him back and said if he didn't obey her all those birds on the box would scratch his eyes out.

Jenny hadn't ever been around anybody as young as Eddie. Not that she knew exactly how old he was. She asked him his age, but he didn't know. And he was so strange. Sometimes he just lay down and went fast asleep as if he was the tiredest child in the world. He curled up on the floor like a kitten and was dead-asleep in a second.

One afternoon Eddie drove her crazy. She couldn't keep up with him. He ran to the table near the window and pulled at the pot of begonias. There was a crash and the pot fell to the floor and broke and the dirt scattered all over the rug. The begonias were her mother's favorite flowers.

Jennie was sick of Eddie. He was naughty. He couldn't stay any longer. He would have to go home. She took his hand and guided him across the hall and knocked on the woman's door. There was no answer. She knocked again. Then she banged hard and heard

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laughter inside, but no one came to the door.

"I don't want you to come to my house again," Jenny told Eddie. She struck the door again and the laughter grew louder, but no one answered her knock. She left Eddie outside and told him to wait for his mother to come to the door and let him in.

She must hurry and clear away the broken flower pot. Her mother couldn't come home tired and exhausted from work and find the mess. There was another flower pot in the kitchen closet. Jenny scooped up the dirt from the floor. She worked carefully. She liked to clean. Her grandmother had let her accompany her throughout the huge house in the country and help with the cleaning chores. Jenny had her own dustcloth and little broom and mop. "That's a darling, helpful girl," her grandmother would say.

Jenny put the broken pot and the spilled soil into a bag and dropped them in the garbage can. Eddie's piercing screams filled the hall.

Let him cry, she didn't care. He sounded as if his lungs would burst. Well, his mother was in her apartment. She should open the door and let him in.

Someone banged on her door. She pretended not to hear. The door seemed about to crack open.

"My mother told me not to open the door for any reason when she's not at home with me," Jenny said.

"Open the door, you little brat," Eddie's mother said.

Jenny put the chain on and opened the door. The woman's clothes weren't on straight. Her hair was messy and her lipstick was smeared, and her breath smelled funny. "Don't you ever leave that child in the hall again, do you hear me?"

The man was right behind Eddie's mother. He was buttoning his shirt and then he smoothed his hair. "Kid, that's no way to treat a little boy. Just thank your lucky stars we aren't going to report you to the police. Next time you may not get off so easy. Watch it."

They went back into the woman's apartment, slammed the door, and there was a silence that frightened Jenny. Then she heard Eddie cry and he began to yell and she heard thumping sounds. They must be striking Eddie. Poor little kid.

When Jenny's mother got home from work she didn't notice that the begonias were in a different pot. "Jenny, darling, my head is splitting," she said. "I'll just take some aspirin and lie

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down for a second." But first Jenny's mother opened a can of beef stew and poured it into a boiler. "Watch that please, sweetie, and when it begins to simmer, let me know." She gave Jenny a hug and a kiss and fell on the bed, and Jenny knew it wouldn't be fair to tell her what had happened. Her mother was worried enough already.

The next afternoon Jenny dawdled on her way home. She would do anything to keep from meeting the man and woman and Eddie in the hall. She had drawn out waving goodbye to Sam until he had literally washed his hands of her. He made shoving gestures at her as if he meant to push her on up the street. Then he formed a megaphone of his hands and shouted, "For God's sake, Jenny, go on. I haven't got all day. Beat it, chum." And then he had thrown a kiss at her just to show he really wasn't angry, but that he had other things to do.

She was too afraid to enter the apartment house. Then she knew she had to go inside because her mother had told her it wasn't safe to stand alone outside.

All her worry was for nothing. The woman and man weren't waiting in the hall. Jenny fumbled for the key. She was sure the minute she turned her back to unlock the door the man and woman would appear with Eddie, but the hall stayed silent and empty.

Once she was inside her apartment she kept waiting for a knock, but there wasn't a sound. She did her chores and her lessons and drew some pictures to mail to her grandmother and Aunt Ellen. She sketched Sam and the dower chest and the pot of begonias. She couldn't make her fingers draw Eddie or his mother or the man. She tried to draw the two halls but they scared her and there really wasn't anything to draw. They were just empty spaces.

She realized then that her mother was late. But her mother had told her never to worry if she should be a bit late, as bus schedules were uncertain and something unexpected might come up to keep her at the store. For all that, her mother got home at almost the exact same time each day.

Then her mother arrived. Her arms were stacked high with packages and Jenny rushed to take the overflow.

"Guess what?" her mother said. "Well, I'll tell you, Miss Jenny Remington Lewis—success at last. My probationary period is up. I've been commended and rewarded—a ten-dollar-a-week raise.

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All made possible by my good and brave Jenny who takes care of herself as if she were a grownup. Tonight we celebrate with Chinese food eaten with chopsticks—the proprietor himself, Mr. Lee, showed me how to use them. And then we'll watch TV until nine. We'll have a real party."

The next afternoon the man and woman were waiting with Eddie, and Jenny's terror returned. She had been so happy all day remembering the fun she'd had with her mother the night before and they had both loved eating with the chopsticks. Then the nicest thing had happened during recess. A little girl named Cindy said she wanted to be Jenny's best friend and she had taught Jenny to play jacks. Her leg didn't make any difference at all when they played jacks and Jenny had caught on right away and had won more games than Cindy.

Eddie must have been crying a long time because his eyes were terribly swollen. He began to misbehave at once and Jenny forgot all about the delicious Chinese food and her mother's raise and having a new best friend. She was sorry for Eddie and then she got angry with him because he acted like a wild animal.

She didn't know what to do. She was tempted to put him in the closet but that would have been cruel. Eddie pulled and tugged at everything and when she tried to restrain him he kicked and thrashed and ran away from her. She couldn't calm him down. He jerked open a drawer and pulled all her mother's slips out and his sticky hands left smudges on them.

Jenny began to cry. She was desperate. She had to do something. She wanted to put Eddie in the dower chest. She pushed at the lid, but she couldn't move it. Then her anger and despair gave her strength. She pushed once more at the lid and shoved at it and it stayed open. All the time Eddie was darting about. He swept books to the floor and turned over a vase of flowers.

"You bad child," Jenny said. "Stop that!" She ran for him. She almost caught him but he jerked away from her and knocked a lamp to the floor. He grabbed at Jenny's brace and made her fall.

Eddie had destroyed the order and beauty that her mother had created in their small dark apartment. Her mother had depended on Jenny to take care of things while she was away earning their living. And her mother had been delighted the night before because of her promotion, and she had said she owed it all to Jenny. And now Jenny had failed her. She had let Eddie wreck the apartment and her mother's heart would be broken.

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Eddie had to stop. No matter what happened he must be made to stop.

Jenny was beside herself. She didn't know what she was doing, but after a while Eddie was very still and Jenny was terrified. She hadn't meant to hurt such a little boy. She had to get away. The cleaning up would have to wait.

She slammed the apartment door shut behind her and her crippled foot slapped like a sledgehammer across the hall floor. When she reached the lobby she heard the woman yell, "Where is Eddie?"

Jenny didn't stop. She reached for the heavy front door and the woman shouted to the man, "Go get the little brat, Joe, and make her tell us what she's done with Eddie." And the man said, "Well, she sure hasn't got the kid with her. He must still be in her apartment. Go get the master key from the super and we'll open the door."

"Get it yourself."

"The super wouldn't know me from Adam. I don't live here."

Jenny dragged herself through the front door. She wanted to run. She willed herself to run, but she tripped and fell and blood spurted from her good knee and her palms were raw and sore from scrambling back to her feet. She knew she should stay, yet she was compelled to leave. No matter what she had done to Eddie, she should have stayed and straightened the apartment. It wouldn't be fair for her mother to come home and find the mess, and Eddie was probably only pretending and was making more mess than ever, now that he was alone.

At last Jenny had to stop for breath. She flopped down on the steps of a vacant house and hoped no one would notice her. She wouldn't know how to answer if anyone asked her why she was sitting there. For a long time no one paid any attention to her and then a woman stopped and looked anxiously at Jenny, but before she said anything, Jenny got up and pushed herself through the tiny space between the two adjoining houses and emerged with a scraped elbow in the back yard. The porch steps were splintered and broken and there was no place for her to sit. She leaned against the fence and began to cry.

It was growing late and cold and it was almost dark. Jenny shivered. She hadn't needed a sweater in her apartment. Her mother must be home by now and worried that Jenny wasn't there.

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Just last night her mother had said Jenny was brave. Brave people didn't run away and they didn't cry and sniffle. She must go back. She had promised her grandmother and Aunt Ellen to take care of her mother and she had run away. She was ashamed of herself.

She couldn't remember the direction she had taken. She peered through the shadows and tried to find a familiar landmark. She recognized nothing and there was no one she could ask directions of.

It was funny how the dark and her fear made everything look strange, because she couldn't be far from home. Her leg couldn't have taken her a long distance. Then she recognized the drug store that she passed every day on her way to and from school. Just beyond the drug store a man lingered in the front of a vacant shop and called out from the shadows, "Come here, little girl, I've got something to show you."

Jenny pretended she hadn't heard him.

She wasn't at all surprised then by what she saw. A police car was parked in front of the apartment house. The man and woman must have called the police to come get Jenny, just as they had threatened to do if she ever left Eddie alone again.

They heard her when she entered the lobby. Nobody could mistake her footsteps. The man wasn't there, but the woman was, and so was Jenny's mother and some strange men.

Her mother looked worried and at the same time happy to see Jenny. "Hello, darling," she said and reached for Jenny's hand and hugged her very close. Jenny could hear her mother's heart beat.

Eddie's mother said, "It's about time the little monster came back to face the music."

A tall man smiled at Jenny. "My name is Williams," he said. "I'm from the Homicide Squad. I'll explain what that is later. Will you please come into your apartment and tell me what happened to Eddie?"

Strangers made Jenny feel shy and awkward. She felt she disappointed whoever was seeing her for the first time because her leg made her different. But she wasn't at all scared of Mr. Williams. He asked Eddie's mother to go to her apartment and not to leave because he would have to talk with her in a little while.

"Where is Eddie?" Jenny asked.

He had been like a whirlwind that afternoon and the apartment

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was so quiet without him, though anyone could see all the havoc he had created. She hated the broken vases and scattered books and overturned chairs and her mother's slips strewn about.

"His mother found him in the chest," Mr. Williams said.

Jenny looked at the dower chest. The lid was closed. She wondered if Eddie was still there. She was afraid to ask.

Mr. Williams kept looking at her spindly leg. He touched her upper arms. His hands were warm and gentle.

"Now then what happened this afternoon, Jenny?"

Suddenly she was very sorry for Eddie.

"You aren't going to punish Eddie, are you?"

She remembered that terrible afternoon when she had listened to Eddie's mother or the man or maybe both of them beat Eddie.

"No."

"You promise."

"I promise." Jenny still hesitated. "I cross my heart, Jenny."

She did her best to tell about Eddie and the afternoons she had spent with him. She hadn't liked Eddie, but she had felt sorry for him, though she didn't at all know what to do with him. Mr. Williams listened intently. Then he looked again at Jenny's leg and once more he touched her arms.

Jenny's mother looked even sadder than Jenny remembered her looking when news came that Jenny's father had been killed in a car crash.

Then, choosing his words carefully, Mr. Williams said to Jenny's mother or to anyone who might be listening, "In my opinion Jenny can't be quite the weightlifter she's been accused of being. My report will say that she couldn't possibly have put little Eddie into the chest. Someone much stronger did that. The poor little boy bears the marks of long abuse. As I said, in my opinion Jenny had nothing to do with his death."

Jenny's mother closed her eyes, and Mr. Williams waited a long time before he spoke again. "There's still a great deal of work to be done here. The photographers will have to take pictures and I'll have to talk with Eddie's mother. Why don't you and Jenny go out and have something to eat?"

Jenny's mother got a sweater and helped Jenny scoop her arms into the sleeves, and then they walked to the drug store. The seats at the counter were all taken and they had to wait. Jenny liked the smell of the cooking and watching the people prepare and serve the orders. Then two customers got up, backed away

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from their seats, and left their money on the checks dampened by water. Jenny and her mother climbed into the vacant places.

Jenny was hungry and asked for a hamburger well done and a milkshake with chocolate ice cream floating, and she could barely wait until her order was placed before her. The ketchup bottle was choked and then it spurted when Jenny struck the bottom. It was the best hamburger she had ever eaten and the milkshake was the best she had ever drunk. Her mother ordered nothing but coffee and drank only a few sips.

Jenny finished every crumb of the hamburger and the straw made a squeaking sound against the bottom of the glass because she was so eager to get every drop of the milkshake. Her mother counted out the money they owed and stacked it neatly on their check. She looked so pale and sad. Jenny took her mother's pocketbook, searched inside, and dug through the tissues and change purse and compact and comb until she found the lipstick and handed it to her mother. Her mother shook her head, but Jenny insisted and her mother circled her mouth with the lipstick and smoothed her lips with her paper napkin.

"I hope Mr. Williams is still in the apartment," Jenny said.

"To be correct, Jenny, he's Lieutenant Williams. I'm sure he will be."

Jenny was sure of it too and she and her mother began the short walk back to their apartment and Lieutenant Williams of the—what did he call it?—the Homicide Squad.

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

A subtle story in the high tradition of English crime writing . . . Miss Lidgett left her bungalow in Windermere Crescent for a long visit to relatives in South Africa. There really was nothing to worry about, leaving her house in the care of a good neighbor . . .

THE GOOD NEIGHBOR

by *JEFFRY SCOTT*

Miss Lidgett wrestled with the problem for days on end, before seeking George Abbey's advice.

"Really, it's like a parable," she explained fretfully. "The promised land awaits me—but only if I forfeit all my worldly goods! Too provoking. Nobody's rich any more, under this dreadful Socialism, but I do treasure my little bits and pieces."

"You'd better step into my office, then, Miss L." Grave and courteous as a foreign minister attending to an influential ambassador, Abbey led her along the side of his house and into what she thought of as the potting shed.

It was a beautifully constructed and cleanly little building, for George Abbey never set his hand to anything shoddy. In there, with the smell of sedge peat, and the sight of scrubbed earthenware flowerpots standing in obedient ranks according to size, some of the tension drained out of Minnie Lidgett. Hanks of raffia, hanging from the crossbeams, brushed her hair; through the single sparkly clean window, she was further soothed by a view of the garden—velvet lawns, weedless colorful borders.

George sat her down on a bentwood chair. "Now then, what's it all about?"

Miss Lidgett forgot what was on her mind, for a moment.

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George Abbey was her very favorite man—oh, not in *that* way, you understand, for she was 60 years old, a spinster from a generation brought up to believe that if carnality had any place at all in the scheme of things, it must be restricted to married people under the age of 40.

But she liked and admired him. Windermere Crescent had gone down in the world since she had moved into the newly built bungalow in 1948, after the death of her father, the Canon. These days, little Japanese motorcycles made the nights full of noise, there was a woman who wore a bathing suit to water her front lawn, standards were flouted, and respectability set at naught.

Abbey was the rock, the reassuring hint that the old ways had not entirely perished. His politeness was instinctive and he knew his place. With his round gray head and mild blue eyes, George put her in mind of an elderly schoolboy, working things out at a slower pace than the sharper rude folk in the neighborhood.

A shame about that wretched wife of his, she thought, and then winced because her musing was being conducted under the cuckolded husband's nose. All the same, it *was* a shame. Miss Lidgett had seen Gwen Abbey coming home late at night, each time in a different car driven by a different man.

"What's the matter?" Abbey inquired, his voice deepening with concern.

Miss Lidgett pulled herself together. Unbidden and unwelcome, a picture flashed in front of her inner eye: she had been looking for Chairman Mao, her Siamese cat, in the little cinder-topped alley behind Windermere Crescent some nights before. And there was Gwen Abbey, sprawled back across the hood of a car, half drunk and hysterical with merriment, while a man fumbled at her. Ugh!

She erased the vision and sat up straight. "My cousin lives in South Africa, George, and he wants me to visit him. He is a wealthy man and—well, there would be no problem over the—well, the expenses involved."

Abbey rubbed his jaw, a slow grin appearing above his blunt square-tipped fingers. "What a bit of luck, my dear! We had a chap from Durban showing color slides at the Gardeners Club last year. Flowers straight out of Paradise, and shrubs to beat the band. You'll love it, Miss L."

Miss Lidgett nodded dubiously. "I'm sure it would be most pleasant, George. But I would be away for at least three months.

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Chairman Mao can go to a cattery, of course—he'd be well looked after. But the house would be empty and unattended. Now you know and I know that the majority of homes in Windermere Crescent have been burgled over the past five years. I'm convinced that the only reason my house has remained safe is that I never leave it for lengthy periods."

"Ah, I see your point." George upended his largest flowerpot and squatted on it, chin in palms, his brow creasing. "Personally I blame the window-cleaners. I'm sure they gossip about who's on holiday, who's got nice things. There's even a tale that they sell information to criminals."

"Decent society is under constant attack," Miss Lidgett said, hardly listening to him, her ears muffled by the steady hoofbeats of her hobby-horse. "At least once a week some unsolicited caller knocks at my door—opinion polls, circulars, jumble-sale collections, those dreadful ruffians hoping to buy antiques on the cheap or simply terrify silly women into parting with money. Now, if they knock and there is no reply, a percentage of those callers promptly break a window and strip one's house."

She sniffed and shook her head. "I don't know why I'm burdening you with this, George. Except that you're a comfort. Wasn't it Somerset Maugham who said that the worst problems are those to which one knows the only possible solution? I must write to my cousin and decline his invitation."

"Hold on, Miss L.! Hold on, I'm thinking." And indeed he was. Miss Lidgett felt quite uncomfortable, for George Abbey's nondescript, pudgy face had drained of all expression, and his knuckles were yellowing under the tension of concentration.

A disloyal corner of her personality—the well-bred, daughter-of-the-rectory corner—yearned to say sharply, "It isn't *that* important, you know." For the first time in some ten years of friendship she felt ashamed of having disclosed something of her life to a person who, for all his manifest worthiness, was rather common, tradesman class.

But then the strained emptiness vanished and George was twinkling at her. "Tell you what, nobody need know you're away. I mean, you don't mix with the rest of the Crescent, and your place lies back a bit from the road. If you don't advertise the fact that you're leaving, I doubt that anybody'll know."

Miss Lidgett stared at him. "But . . . no, what about the milk, and the letters?"

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George chuckled and laid a finger alongside his squashy nose. "If you trust me with a key, Miss L., I can nip through the hedge at the back here, in through your kitchen, and take in the milk and the mail. You needn't cancel your milk, see; I'll just knock a pint a day off my order and take your bottle."

He was quite excited, and pleased with himself. "Yes, and I can draw the curtains every morning, and pull them across every night. It'll look as if you're still there."

Miss Lidgett considered the proposal. She had no qualms about giving Abbey a key. What little jewelry she had was at the bank, and he was one of nature's gentlemen, despite his class. She knew that he would never use her absence as an excuse to snoop and rummage among her possessions. That he was utterly honest went without question.

And yet . . . "Is it practical, George?" Catching the spirit of his plan, she giggled. "I suppose it is."

"No trouble," Abbey claimed firmly. "The neighbors are used to seeing me pruning your roses and running a mower over the front lawn—I've done that for years. So they're accustomed to seeing me being about your place."

"Well, if you wouldn't mind, George." Miss Lidgett clasped her dry shapely old hands. "Oh, George! Am I really going to South Africa?"

"You're practically on the airplane," he assured her.

The scheme was polished and perfected over the next ten days. Abbey owned a hardware store and its revenue allowed him to live in semi-retirement. He persuaded Miss Lidgett that far from being a nuisance, keeping an eye on her bungalow would give him an interest.

"I suppose I'd better inform the police that I'm going away," she mentioned, during one of their conferences in the potting shed. "It would be dreadful if you were seen in my bungalow and somebody called the police, thinking you were an intruder, George."

Abbey mulled over the point. "I wouldn't, if I were you, Miss L. I'm not saying anything against the police, mind. But you hear funny stories. There was that case of the policemen breaking into places when they were on night duty, somewhere up Durham way. It was all in the papers.

"What I don't like is, they've got a special book where they put the names and addresses of people on holiday. Who's to know who sneaks a look at that book? No, it's a very long chance that

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anyone will see me in your place, and if they do—well, I'm a respectable man. And you can leave me a little letter of authority—To Whom It May Concern, kind of thing."

He wagged a finger at her. "A secret's not a secret if more than one person knows it. I'm not telling Gwen. But it's up to you."

"I expect you're right, George."

"I'll forward your mail once a week, as soon as you write to me with your Cape Town address," he continued. "By your leave, if there are any bills—telephone, utilities, and so forth, I'll pay them and we can settle up on your return, when you've had a look at the receipts."

No doubt about it, the episode was exciting as well as mildly embarrassing. The night before her departure—his wife was out, naturally—George carried Miss Lidgett's suitcases through the gap in the back-garden hedge and put them in his own car.

The following morning Miss Lidgett, far too smartly dressed for a visit to the greengrocer, but otherwise unobtrusive, strolled out of the Crescent in the direction of the shops. George Abbey picked her up outside the supermarket and drove to London's Heathrow Airport. Three hours later she was heading across the globe. . .

The holiday swept Miss Lidgett off her feet.

The climate dazzled her and worked a change in her personality. She bought several swimsuits and once appeared, at a beach barbecue, with a naked midriff. Alfred, her cousin, and his wife Mildred were young in spirit, and somehow Miss Lidgett caught the trick of it.

Every week came a fat airmail package: George Abbey was punctilious, forwarding everything from personal letters to bargain-offer soap coupons. She was touched when, after a month, he sent a color photo of her front garden, with the roses in bloom.

And he wrote long covering letters, a quaint weekly mixture of steward-and-butler's report and local gossip. "You have a cracked rain-gutter at the back and I have taken the liberty of seeing to it. The one-legged blackbird is back and looks fit, I'm glad to say . . . Your Friend and Obdnt. Servant, G. Abbey."

One morning Miss Lidgett found that the shallow drawer beneath her dressing table had jammed, and was taken aback when she counted the airmail packages stowed there. She had been away from England for four months.

"So?" drawled Mildred. "You haven't seen half of the sights yet,

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darling. What's the rush? Your Good Samaritan is looking after everything."

"Yes, but . . . I'm outstaying my welcome."

"Rubbish, you're talking rubbish." Alfred squeezed her shoulder. "Once we've got the birthday party out of the way, then we'll *maybe* discuss your going back."

Margaret, Mildred and Alfred's daughter, celebrated her twenty-first birthday in three weeks' time, and was to become engaged on the same day. Sipping freshly squeezed orange juice, blooming in the sun. Miss Lidgett decided that it would be churlish to insist on leaving before the party.

A month later she began stirring herself. Several days were invested in selecting a very expensive present for George Abbey.

The taxi from Heathrow set Miss Lidgett down outside her bungalow.

A sense of anticlimax was inevitable, of course. She felt a pang—jealousy, perhaps, and knowledge of loneliness—to see the house unchanged. Not in the least neglected, but there was a change—in herself. The bungalow now looked mean and meagre.

Sensibly she went straight indoors and to bed, unpacking only her nightclothes and washing gear. The next morning, having emptied the suitcases and set her wardrobe to rights, she went out on the patio.

Her heart lurched.

The man, burly and flashily dressed, was skulking behind the raspberry canes. Miss Lidgett whimpered and stepped back through the French windows, groping for the telephone. And then she replaced it after dialing only one digit.

The intruder, waving and calling, was George Abbey. Silently she watched him approaching. He was wearing flared trousers in a gaudily checked pattern, a crimson shirt, and a leather belt with a bright brass buckle almost the size of a saucer.

Equal to most challenges, Miss Lidgett was floundering. Abbey paused before the windows. "You're back then, Miss L! Welcome home, welcome indeed!"

"Would you like a cup of coffee, George?"

"Wouldn't say no. Tell you what, I'll pop back and fetch the paperwork. Won't be a mo'."

Miss Lidgett sniffed the air where George had been standing. Scent. After-shave, it was sold as, but she regarded it as scent. Dazedly she prepared the coffee. George returned with a buff-

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colored file under his arms, and she noticed that his shoes were white buckskin with gilt buckles.

It was a relief when he sat down and started explaining the contents of the file—phone bill, so much left in an envelope for the window cleaner ("So he'd never cotton to your being away"), so much given to the charity collections ("I didn't return all the envelopes they pushed through the door, you understand, only the ones I was certain you supported").

"This figure, £108, is what I have receipts for, and this one, £15-25, is for payments to tradesmen and charity and so forth, where there aren't receipts."

Miss Lidgett opened her checkbook. "Thank you very much." She was absurdly embarrassed, for George Abbey had changed. It was more than the ridiculous clothes—he was full of himself, commanding, faintly impatient.

"The garden's a picture," she ventured, trying to discount her ambivalent feelings toward a man who had gone to much trouble on her account.

A shadow crossed his face. "Yes, well, I've spent more time over here lately than in my own garden. I didn't tell you about all the fuss when I wrote—no point in upsetting you.

"Gwen, my wife, upped and left me a couple of weeks after you went abroad. It had been in the cards for years, bound to happen. We both know she was flighty."

Miss Lidgett sputtered on her coffee. George gave her a straight look. "It was nice of you to look the other way all those years, Miss L. Don't think I wasn't grateful for the way you ignored what was going on.

"Anyway, Gwen went off with one of her fancy men. Her sister cut up rough after a week or two, reckoned something must have happened to Gwen. The police came and I told them the whole thing—showed 'em all the clothes she'd taken. Her side of the wardrobe was damned near empty. Excuse the swearing, Miss L.

"Inspector Clough from the Borough Force, he was very nice, very understanding. But Gwen's sister was pestering him, so—well, they had to dig up my garden."

Miss Lidgett's ears were singing. "Dig up—"

"In case I'd buried Gwen's body there," Abbey explained. "It looks like a minefield now. I haven't had the heart to put it right—it would take years. I'm selling my house, moving down to the coast."

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Folding the check in half, Abbey got to his feet. "Still, it's an ill wind and all that. I love my gardening, so I spent all my time on yours."

He paused, and she saw that his forehead glistened. "Up behind the raspberry canes, remember where you always wanted a garden shed? Well, that's what I was checking, just now. The concrete's hard, and I'll send a couple of men up from the shop this afternoon to erect the shed."

Miss Lidgett drew herself up. She reviewed the years in her mind—George Abbey's patience, his wife's deplorable and provocative conduct, and then, returning to the present, the matter of a new garden shed.

Calculations raced through her head. The police would have called on Abbey's next-door neighbors. So how had he—of course! Abbey had the key to her bungalow, and Miss Lidgett was not known to the police.

They had knocked at her door, and a woman had answered. There was a woman, all right: George Abbey's after-shave and flared trousers proved that. Yes, *a* Miss Lidgett had assured the detectives that there was nothing she could tell them about Mr. Abbey. Apart from the fact that she never left the bungalow for more than an hour or two at a time, and therefore it was impossible for Abbey to have buried anything in *her* garden.

George asked humbly, "Anything else, Miss Lidgett, or are we all squared away now?"

"Nothing else, George. I wish you good fortune."

Abbey hung his head, the elderly schoolboy, the deceptive dunce. "Um . . . I won't be seeing you again, then? Before I move?"

"No, George. I don't believe you will." Decision, not speculation.

Later that day Miss Lidgett inspected the neat square of concrete where the shed would stand. It lay in a pleasant corner, the privet hedge sheltering it. But it was not hallowed ground.

Then again, unlike the Almighty, Miss Lidgett was not all-seeing, all-knowing. There was at least a 50-50 chance that if she called the police and had the concrete broken up, had the earth beneath searched, nothing would be found.

And Gwen Abbey had been a terrible wife. Was George Abbey to be persecuted when the only firm evidence against him was that of being an obsessively good neighbor?

Miss Lidgett shook her head, turned her back on the concrete, and walked back to the bungalow.

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a *NEW* detective story by

DAN J. MARLOWE

We welcome Dan J. Marlowe's return to EQMM after an absence of twelve years—years and years too long. And we welcome a low-key police procedural, utterly different from the usual movie and TV fare—no violence (at least, on scene), no blood, no desperate explosive chases—welcome relief from the kind of thrills that have become stale from repetition . . .

THE MAN IN CHARGE

by DAN J. MARLOWE

Chief of Police Robert Wampler shook hands with the federal man when the latter was brought into the chief's new office. "Say, don't I know you from somewhere?" the federal man exclaimed, doing a double-take after the self-introductions.

"It's possible," Wampler said quietly. He was a burly man with a square-looking chin. He was used to the reaction although it still hurt. "What's on your mind?"

"Yeah, that's right," the federal man said, still intent on his own train of thought. "You were police chief in—"

"I was fired from that job." Wampler still had to strain to keep his voice emotionless. "I'm chief here now, and you evidently have something to say to me or you wouldn't be here."

"Yeah, sure," the other man said, but he looked doubtful. Then he shrugged fatalistically. "Look, we've got a line on a burglary gang that's been moving steadily across the country, and we feel we've discovered a pattern in their operation."

Wampler raised an eyebrow. "And you think they're going to pay us a visit in this little town?"

"Because of the pattern," the federal man said. "Let me lay it out for you. They almost always—"

"Just a minute," Wampler interrupted him. "Let me call in my

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senior men so they can hear it, too."

He spoke briefly into his intercom, then leaned back in his chair with his eyes closed to inhibit conversation. Wampler knew what the federal man was thinking. Wampler had been Chief of Police of a 500-man force. Here in the almost brand-new resort community of Costa del Mare he commanded 18 men. He had lost his former job because of a discipline problem. He had come up through the ranks and tried to remain friendly with former comrades. It hadn't worked. The federal man could hardly be blamed for feeling that in the light of Wampler's background the transmission of his current information would be like whistling down a drainpipe.

Detectives Harry Smith, Al Wilson, and Julio Silva filed into the office. They took seats at Wampler's hand motion. "The feds have something for us," Wampler explained.

"Yeah," the federal man began again. "There's this burglary gang moving across the country. They stop at small towns or unincorporated suburbs where they can expect police efficiency and sophistication to be—ah—somewhat less than in big cities. They usually select a jewelry firm, a custom furrier, someone like that with something to lose."

"And you have some reason for thinking Costa del Mare is on their list," Harry Smith suggested, repeating Chief Wampler's earlier question without making it sound like a question. Smith was a man in his early thirties who looked like an ex-athlete. Wampler thought of him as a plodder. Not brilliant, but a man who would stick to routine and solve his fair share of cases. In fact, Smith reminded Wampler of himself at Smith's age.

"The circumstances make it likely," the federal man was saying. "All the places they've hit were playing host to some nationally advertised event—a convention, a golf tournament, a gathering of any kind requiring extra police activity."

"The National Numismatics Association convention next week!" Detective Al Wilson exclaimed. Wilson was a man who always had to be drawing attention to himself, Wampler thought. Wilson drove his unmarked car with the siren on and his police radio at blaring volume. The car might just as well have had *POLICE* lettered on it in foot-high letters.

"That's the drawing card," the federal man said. "Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of valuable coins will be on display."

"But Chief Wampler has already drawn up plans to protect the

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convention," Detective Harry Smith objected.

"Yes, and while you're laying on that protection the rest of the community goes bare, or nearly so," the federal man said. "Small police departments can seldom adjust quickly to unusual demands, and this gang depends on that. They'll come into town a day or so early and case the main event. Then if they decide its protection is too good to hit, they'll shift to the second-best target in the area, which will probably have little or no protection."

Wampler saw Julio Silva open his mouth, then close it again. Wampler sighed to himself. Silva was a quiet man, unlike Al Wilson, but he had a fault as bad as an excess of bravado. The product of a Mexican-Italian marriage, Silva was ashamed of his accent and of his lack of education. He never asked questions. Never once had he asked to have an assignment explained or clarified. Julio Silva hadn't learned yet that the only stupid questions were the unasked ones.

Chief Wampler spoke to the federal man. "If you have any suggestions about how you feel we should handle this, I'd be glad to consider them," he said. In the one sentence he made it clear that although he valued the information and would welcome advice, his was an independent force, not taking orders from anyone.

"Well, sir, no offense intended, but you people aren't equipped to handle this gang. They're pros. Most local businesses I've seen have no alarms, and they'd present no real problems to a gang that knew its business. The best you can hope for is to make the gang decide to move on."

"And how do you suggest that we make them want to move on?" Wampler asked.

"If you can keep security at the convention hall really tight, and at the same time *increase* patrols in the business district, that should be all that's necessary. This gang counts on a big event to force a city to spread its police force thin. When they see it hasn't worked, they move on. They don't go ramming their heads against stone walls."

Harry Smith spoke up, his tone dry. "It wouldn't say much for us as a police force if all we could do is make them move on."

Chief Wampler agreed, but he said nothing aloud. The conference broke up after a few more exchanges about possible deterrents. The chief sat in his office after the others left, thinking. He had taken the job in Costa del Mare because he couldn't get a better one, but he had come to like the place. His hiring had been a

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compromise. The City Council had liked his experience, if not his image as a loser. And he was all they could afford.

Wampler took a map of the area from his desk drawer and studied it. Then he placed a compass point on Costa del Mare and drew a twenty-mile circle around it. He considered it for a moment, then drew a thirty-mile circle. He turned to the yellow pages in his telephone directory and studied the motel listing. There were lots of motels in the burgeoning resort area, but he knew more than one-half of the motel operators personally.

Sighing, he drew his phone toward him. "Yeah, Jerry," he said to the voice that answered his first call. "I'm expecting three, four male strangers in town, probably an out-of-state license on their car, keep to themselves. Would you let me know if any group like that shows up at your place?"

Patiently he went down the list of motels within the thirty-mile radius indicated on his map, making the additional calls. It was the kind of routine procedural work he would ordinarily have assigned to a desk sergeant, but he wasn't sure enough yet of his work force to be certain it would be done properly. And he had to admit to himself wryly that in view of his own somewhat shaky status he wanted to maintain control.

He sent for Detective Harry Smith again. "The convention begins day after tomorrow, Harry," he began, "so that means most of the coin collectors will be in town by tomorrow night." It should also mean that the gang would be in town by tomorrow night, looking for the easiest and safest target. "I'm making one change in the plans we've already set up for our convention coverage."

"Let me guess," Smith said. "We're hiring a bunch of specials to take the place of the regular officers assigned to the convention so we can free those men up to cover the streets."

Wampler smiled as he shook his head. "That's what the federal man would undoubtedly like us to do, but the local City Council isn't as amenable to deficit financing as the federal government. No, we'll go with what we have. I'm pulling Wilson and Silva off the convention floor and keeping them here with me as a backup reserve. Starting tomorrow night I want you to take foot patrol officers Menendez and Hart with you in a black-and-white and cruise Main Street from city line to city line every hour on the hour. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Smith replied, writing the particulars in his notebook. He looked up from his scribbling. "But isn't that

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rather—uh—predictable, Chief? By the gang, I mean?"

On his previous job Chief Wampler would have explained his thinking, but he had learned that informational ripples, widening outward from the source, had a way of diminishing performance as each recipient fed his own personal input into the sum total, input tilted by the very human desire to be a hero.

"You have your orders, Harry," he said quietly.

"Yes, sir," Smith repeated. He left the office reluctantly.

Wampler went home for what he knew would be his last good night's sleep until the numismatists had left town.

Al Wilson and Julio Silva were waiting for him in his office in the morning. Silva was silent as usual, but Wilson was voluble. "What about these new orders, Chief?" he demanded, waving a sheet of paper. "There seems to be a mistake."

Wampler took the mimeographed roster sheet from him and looked at it. "This is correct," he said.

"But—" Wilson swallowed. The original assignment sheet had placed him in charge of the police force on the convention floor, and he had been looking forward to it. He didn't want to complain about that point directly, however. "You've pulled all our evening patrols out of the business district except for one car with Smith and the two patrolmen. Everyone else is either assigned to the convention hall or is on reserve here at headquarters." He paused. "I have to think that's risky."

"You don't have to think at all," Wampler said crisply. "I want you here tonight. Both of you. That's all."

They left his office, Wilson almost stamping his feet. Wampler smiled, but the smile died when the door closed behind them. His plan *was* risky, but it was the best he could come up with given his manpower limitations. He left his office and drove his private car through the center of town. He slowed down in front of the large display windows of Naismith's Jewelry. Sunlight reflected from a dozen tiers of diamond rings and other expensive jewelry.

Diagonally across the street the showcase window of Ben Russo's Fur Shop displayed a single rich-looking fur coat that called attention to itself more discreetly. It would be difficult for a ripoff gang to drive through town without marking down either or both for a possible visit.

Chief Wampler spent the afternoon in his office charting and recharting the situation. When he finally threw his pencil down and rubbed his eyes, he wasn't satisfied, but he was moderately

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confident. His telephone rang, and he picked up the receiver.

"This is Will Grimes, Chief," a cracked voice announced. Will Grimes was the elderly proprietor of Roadside Cabins, a modest establishment catering to salesmen. "I got 'em, just like you said. Four of 'em in an outta-state Chrysler. Funny thing, first thing they did was rent another car."

To blend in with the local scenery, Wampler thought. "Thanks, Will. There'll undoubtedly be some coming and going, but what I want you to watch for is when the four of them leave together in the rental car. Call me right that second. Okay?"

"You betcha, Chief."

Wampler dialed the convention hall immediately. "Get this, now," he said to Ted Drury, whom he had placed in charge of security. "I want every one of our men out on the floor, highly visible. I want us really showing the flag. Got it?"

"Sure thing, Chief. We're gettin' a few more people through here all the time."

But not so many yet that the patrolling police wouldn't stand out, Wampler thought.

He ordered a cot moved into his office. He would sleep there tonight in case he'd guessed wrong about the gang taking the first night to case the town thoroughly. That should be their m.o., from what the federal man had said, but he didn't want to be caught short if they moved sooner.

Wilson and Silva reported glumly and sat at their desks, their attitude a mute reproach to him. Wampler slept in snatches through the long night and awoke unrefreshed. He sent Wilson and Silva home to rest up for the night ahead. There had been no night-time alarms. Wampler checked the morning reports and delayed going out to breakfast until the stores in the business district had opened and no irate merchant reported a break-in.

Back in his office he studied Harry Smith's report. Smith and the two patrolmen had faithfully covered the city in the black-and-white. There wasn't three minutes' deviation in their city-crossing patrols. Harry Smith could follow orders. Not too many of that type around these days.

His telephone rang, and Wampler picked it up. "What's this I hear about you pulling off all our street protection?" City Councilman Ray Graves demanded angrily. He was the owner of Graves Drug Store.

"Not all," Wampler replied evenly. He made no attempt to jus-

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tify his action. He realized with a faint feeling of surprise that on his previous job he would have. "Everything is going to be all right, Mr. Graves."

"It had damn well better be, or it's your badge," Graves threatened him before banging down the telephone receiver.

Wampler closed his eyes momentarily. He knew he had Al Wilson to thank for the phone call. Wilson would think it prudent to inform Councilman Graves that the Chief of Police was making a blunder.

The daylight hours seemed endless. He tried to rest during the afternoon, but tossed restlessly on the cot. He returned from his skimpy evening meal with a heavy feeling that turned rapidly to indigestion. He ignored it as he sat down at his desk again.

Harry Smith entered, smiling. "You want us back in the black-and-white tonight, Chief?" Smith asked. The question was so cheerful that Wampler studied him. "It took me half last night but I think I got it figured now," Smith went on, his smile turning to a grin. "You *want* them to know where we are, right?"

"Back into the black-and-white," was all Wampler said, but he returned Smith's grin. His instincts hadn't been wrong about the senior detective.

Wampler's desk telephone rang at 9:05 P.M. "Will Grimes, Chief," the voice said. "You called it. The four of 'em left in the rented car five minutes ago. Headin' towards town."

"Thanks, Will," Wampler responded. He no longer felt tired, no longer noticed his indigestion. He felt rejuvenated. The beauty of a known m.o. was that the gang wouldn't change it because it had worked so well for them. Now the m.o. would work for the police.

He forced himself to wait for an hour. Got to give them time to reassure themselves, time to get started on the job. The final thing he did before leaving his office was to jot down on a piece of scratch paper the telephone numbers of Naismith's Jewelry and Ben Russo's Fur Shop.

He strode into the outer office and pointed a finger at Al Wilson and Julio Silva's bored faces hunched over a checkerboard. "We move now," Wampler told them. They came to life. He included the desk sergeant on the expedition, leaving only a clerk on duty.

They gathered outside, the night air fragrant with nocturnal blossoms. "Where to?" Wilson asked, heading toward his car.

"We'll take a black-and-white," Wampler said. He ignored the surprised looks on the faces of his men. "Head for Naismith's

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Jewelry. And no siren," he added as Wilson slipped under the steering wheel.

They turned onto Main Street and headed north. Wampler looked at his watch. "Pull over and stop," he said. He swung around on the front seat to look through the rear window. Four minutes later he saw the dome of a police flasher silhouetted on the roof of an approaching car even before he recognized it as Harry Smith's black-and-white. He nudged Wilson. "Smith's coming up behind us. Tell him to follow. Flasher on but siren off. No, stay off the air," he added as Wilson reached for the microphone hanging down from the center of the dashboard. "Step out and flag him down."

Wilson delivered the message. Smith's black-and-white fell in behind as they traveled along the nearly deserted street. The flashing red lights rebounded from store windows into the street. Two blocks from Naismith's a man sat on a bench at a bus stop. When he saw the two black-and-whites in tandem, he got up casually and walked toward a lighted telephone booth located against the building behind him.

"Head him off!" Wampler barked.

Wilson rammed the black-and-white up onto the sidewalk and herded the man against the building wall. They all piled out and shook him down. The man was unarmed. There was nothing in any of his pockets, but in his left hand were two dimes and a matchbook cover with a telephone number inked on it. Chief Wampler looked at the number and smiled. It matched the one for Naismith's Jewelry on the slip of paper in his pocket.

"Take this one in and hold him," he said to Wilson.

Wilson started to argue, then subsided sullenly. Eventually he would realize, if he didn't already, Wampler thought, that he was being cut off from the action because he had leaked departmental information to Councilman Graves.

Wilson muscled his silent prisoner into the cruiser and drove off. Wampler turned to the desk sergeant. "Their rental getaway car is bound to be within a block of here. Find it and stay with it."

"Yes, sir!" the sergeant said. He trotted around the corner.

"Silva, take Menendez and Hart around to the back entrance of Naismith's with you," Wampler continued. "Smith and I will take the side entrance. One or the other has been forced."

Silva cleared his throat. "How 'eavy we come down on 'em eef

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they make a run for it, Chief?"

It was an intelligent question, and Wampler chose his words carefully in replying. "I don't think these men are armed, but if you see a gun, don't let them shoot first. We'll give you two minutes to get around in back."

He and Smith approached the side entrance carefully. The door hung at an angle from shattered hinges. They entered, guns in hand, and surprised three men at the rear of the shop standing in front of the safe.

"Nobody moves!" Wampler ordered.

Two of the men put their hands resignedly on top of the safe, in plain sight. The third man dashed for the rear entrance. Harry Smith sighted his gun at him, then lowered it. The man had carried no weapon. "Julio will make a pretzel out of him," Smith said.

There was the sound of bodies colliding. Julio appeared with the third man's limp figure tucked under one muscular arm. Wampler turned his attention to the safe. An array of burglars' tools was spread neatly on the floor, but the safe didn't have a scratch on it. To one side sat a portable short-wave radio tuned to the Costa del Mare police frequency. Ted Drury was reporting to the stationhouse that all was well at the Convention Center. Harry Smith shut off the radio and read the prisoners their rights.

Smith, Menendez, Hart, and the desk sergeant were bubbling during the ride with the prisoners back to the stationhouse. Even the usually silent Julio Silva was smiling and interjecting a short sentence or two. He spoke again as they led the prisoners inside.

"Hola, you," he said, tapping Chief Wampler on the shoulder. "*Muy zorrundo*. Veree foxy."

Everyone laughed, then settled down cheerfully to the endless paperwork.

Chief Wampler went into his office and closed the door. He sat down in his chair and relaxed muscles he hadn't known were still tensed.

Harry Smith hadn't fired when he could have though he had sufficient provocation.

Julio Silva had finally broken his long silence.

And Al Wilson had learned that police department business must remain police department business.

He could make a police force of these men.

And, in the process, a police chief of himself.

He locked his desk and went home to get a good night's sleep.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

NOT SLEEPING, JUST DEAD, by Charles Alverson. Houghton Mifflin Company, $7.95.

Seedy, cynical, and endearing detective hero Joe Goodey first appeared in *Goodey's Last Stand,* which *The New Yorker called* "the next best thing to finding a new and unsuspected Raymond Chandler phantasmagoria." In Charles Alverson's newest creation, Goodey is called into action to investigate the mysterious death of a wealthy businessman's granddaughter at The Institute, a rehabilitative commune on the coast of Big Sur. While visiting the commune, Goodey is soon swept along with the resident misfits into a constant round of therapeutic encounters, but, true to form, he never loses sight of his real goal.

THE NIRVANA CONTRACTS, by James P. Wohl. Bobbs-Merrill Co., $7.95.

Among the passengers on a TWA flight to Paris are four men who are targeted for death: a crippled baggage handler, a small-time insurance broker, a flunky for the Mafia, and a CIA agent. In the plane's hold is a $6 million gold shipment, destined for a Liechtenstein bank. Exactly two hours out of Kennedy the plane explodes, and it is obvious that the saboteur was *someone on the plane.*

What do these four ill-sorted men have in common? Who would gain by losing a fortune in bullion? Above all, who would wreak such havoc knowing that he, too, would die?

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

CRIME PREVENTION

by LEE RUSSELL

Deducing and dining, quite effectively,
The Black Widowers play detectively,
But it's an all-male group whenever they meet
Because everyone knows what black *widows* eat.

© *1977 by Lee Russell.*

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 478th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the story of a social worker assigned to prison work . . .

The author, William J. Dudley, is in his late thirties, has been married for more than seventeen years, and has two teenage children. He works "as an Editing-Analyst for engineering specifications," is a "part-time driving instructor," plays the trumpet—and has become "hooked on writing."

If one has to have an addiction, writing is heartily recommended—at least so saith your Editor . . .

ON DEATH ROW

by WILLIAM J. DUDLEY

I waited as the heavy steel door slid to the side, then I stepped through the opening, followed closely by the guard in the drab gray prison uniform. We walked the long corridor, past all the empty barred cages, to the last cell, the only one that was occupied. You don't find many people on Death Row these days.

The guard looked into the cell and said, "You got a visitor, Snake."

The man sitting on the cot had tattoos of snakes coiled around both forearms. Without looking up from the comic book he was reading, he said, "I don't need no visitors. Tell him to get lost."

I put my hand on the bars and said, "Harry, I would like to talk to you for a few minutes."

The man looked up at me. "What are you, some sort of do-gooder? I don't need no soul saver. What I need is a life saver. If you can't do that, get lost."

"I'd just like to talk to you for a few minutes, if you would let me come in."

He waved the comic book. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

"I won't take much of your time, Harry."

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He went back to reading the comic, curling one leg under himself as he did. He didn't look the way you would expect a murderer to look. He had light-colored hair and pale blue eyes. The eyes struck me as those of a trapped animal. He might not have been bad-looking if he didn't have an oversized jaw and a nose that had been broken at least once.

"What's it gonna be, Snake?" asked the guard. "In or out?"

"What do I care?" he said. "Long as he keeps his mouth shut."

The guard opened the barred door and let me step into Snake's cell. I heard the door clang shut behind me and turned to watch the guard walk back down the corridor.

I leaned against the bars and waited for the condemned man to finish reading. The only furnishings in the cell were the cot that he was sitting on and the toilet and sink. Just below the small barred window on the far wall was a pile of comic books.

I've been familiar with prisons for a few years. I'm a social worker assigned to prison work, but I had never seen a man on Death Row before. The cells on the row are smaller than the regular cells. They are more heavily guarded and more sparsely furnished.

This man, Harry Insen, had been waiting here for two years, but I didn't know about him until a couple of days ago. I came as soon as I heard he was here.

It occurred to me as I stood there that this was quite possibly the same cell in which my father awaited execution twenty years before.

When Snake finished the comic book, he tossed it onto the pile under the window. Then he turned to me and said, "Yeah, what is it?"

"I'd just like to know if there's any way I can help you, anything I can get to make you more comfortable."

"Comfortable!" snarled Snake, "I'm only going to be here a couple more days. I don't need nothin' to make me comfortable. Like I said when you were outside my cottage door, if you can't get me out of here, I don't need you."

"I can't get you out of here, but I thought you might want to talk to someone."

"Well, I don't. I been by myself a long time and I don't need nobody now!"

I walked over to the cot and sat down on it. "The guard told me that I'm the first visitor you've had since you've been here. Don't

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you have any friends, Harry?"

"I don't need no friends. I look out for Number One. And don't call me Harry. I been Snake since the day I got these pictures on my arms." He held up his arms for me to see.

"Okay, Snake. I'd like you to think of me as your friend. I know what you're going through."

"You know what I'm going through!" He laughed. "How could you know what I'm going through? Are you going to be dead in two days too? You know what I'm going through, all right!"

"Look, Snake. My father was executed in this same prison twenty years ago for a murder he didn't commit."

"Yeah, he didn't commit it," said Snake. "That's what they all said before they outlawed the chair. Well, I admit what I did. I couldn't deny it if I wanted to. They got me on video tape. I just didn't know the dude was a cop. He looked like a junkie to me. Cop killin's about the only thing they can give you the chair for these days."

"But I know my father was innocent. My mother and I were with him at the time the woman was murdered."

"So how come he fried?" Snake asked.

"My mother wasn't allowed to testify because she was his wife, and I was too young. The woman was shot with my father's gun. It had been stolen, but my father didn't know it was missing until after he was arrested. He had taken us to the movies the night of the murder, but they couldn't find anyone who remembered seeing us there."

Snake's eyes seemed to harden. "Well, that's tough, but I got my own problems, so get the hell out of here."

"I'm sorry, Snake. I didn't mean to burden you with my troubles. I know you've got your own."

"Well, I don't want to listen to you any more, so get out."

"Snake," I said quietly, "isn't there someone you'd like me to get in touch with for you?"

"No, I don't want you to get hold of nobody. I just want you out." He called the guard.

I heard the heavy door slide and the guard walking down the corridor.

"Snake," I persisted, "don't you have any friends? Isn't there anyone who'll miss you?"

"I got friends," he snapped. "I'll be missed. Benny will miss me."

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"Benny who? Why hasn't he been to see you in all this time?"

"Never mind Benny who, just get out."

The guard opened the door to let me out. As we walked along the corridor I felt that it was my fault I hadn't been able to reach Snake.

The following morning I went to the public library and read all the newspaper clippings I could find about Snake's arrest and trial. Nowhere could I find any mention of anyone named Benny or Benjamin.

I decided to drive into the city to Snake's old neighborhood to see if I could find this friend. I used to know the city fairly well. I grew up there.

Everything about the area was ugly. While other parts of the city were being rejuvenated, it seemed this section was just crumbling into the streets.

It was a neighborhood of rapid turnover. The people move in because they have nowhere else to go and they get out as fast as they can.

I went to the rat-infested old tenement where Snake had lived, but no one in the building remembered the man.

Next I decided I would try some of the local bars. I was able to find several bartenders who remembered Harry "Snake" Insen. One of them even considered him some sort of celebrity for having killed a police officer. I was able to find only one who had a vague recollection of a sickly little man named Benny.

"Any idea where I might find this Benny?" I asked him.

"None at all," said the bartender. "He was only in here a couple of times with Snake. But I'll tell you, I was happiest when I didn't see either of them."

I was about to leave when he said, "Tell you what you might do. Try some of the poolrooms. If I remember right, Snake was pretty good with a cue. He used to win drinks all night by playing pool on the quarter table in the back."

At the first poolroom I visited I found an old man sweeping the floor who looked as if his brain had been washed away by alcohol. He told me he knew Benny and that the last time he saw him he was working at the Straight Cue Billiard Parlor.

When I walked into the Straight Cue I was able to spot Benny immediately. He was racking balls on the other side of the room, and he was bent and sickly just as the bartender had described him.

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I walked over and introduced myself. "I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes, if you don't mind."

"What about?" he asked through rotting teeth.

"Your friend Snake."

"I ain't got no friend Snake." He looked shaken. "Look, I don't want no trouble."

"Trouble!" I said. "Snake is scheduled to die tomorrow and he thinks you're his friend. And you tell me you don't want any trouble. What kind of man are you?"

Benny grabbed my arm and pulled me into a storage room. "Look, I ain't no friend of Snake's. He used to make me hang out with him. If I said no, he'd threaten to beat me. Then he'd tell me things I didn't want to hear and he warned me if I ever told anyone, he'd kill me. I believed him. It wouldn't mean anything to him if he killed me."

"What kind of things did he tell you, Benny?"

"I told ya, I can't say. I don't want no trouble."

"Benny, Snake is going to die tomorrow. He won't be able to hurt you any more. What kind of things did he tell you?"

"He used to go out and do things and then he'd come back and tell me about them. And then he'd laugh and say, 'You couldn't do that, you're chicken.' And then he'd say, 'If I ever find out you told anybody, I'll kill you with my bare hands!' "

"What kind of things did he say he did?"

"Bad things," said the little man. "He said he killed people!"

"Killed people! You mean the policeman wasn't the first?"

"Oh, no. He killed a lot of people before that."

"How? Why?"

"He used to say he liked to watch people die," said Benny. "What he used to do was to go someplace he'd never been before and kill someone he didn't know. And he'd always try to use a different weapon. He knew the police would be looking for somebody with a motive. He never had no motive, so he knew they'd never figure on him."

I've dealt with many criminals in my social work, but I don't remember ever being so shocked. I asked, "How long had he been doing this?"

"From way back when we were in high school. And he was thinking about it way before. Then one night he broke into some house he was going to rob and found a gun. So he took the gun and went out and killed some woman."

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I could feel myself starting to tremble. "How long ago was that, Benny?"

"Oh, it's gotta be at least twenty years ago. We were still in high school."

"Where did he do it, Benny?" It was an effort for me to control my voice.

"I think it was somewhere down near the armory."

I grabbed his shirt and pulled him toward me. "And you never told anyone?" I shouted. "Why didn't you tell the police?"

I could see he was terrified. "I told you. He'd kill me."

I was almost screaming. "Did you know that an innocent man was arrested, tried, convicted, and executed for that murder?"

"Yeah," said Benny. "Yeah, I knew. I told Snake and he just laughed. He said he was off the hook."

I couldn't stop myself when I smashed Benny in the face with my fist. He flew backward, crashing into a pile of boxes. I wanted to kick him, but I caught myself in time.

I waited as the heavy steel door slid to the side, then I stepped through the opening, followed closely by the guard in the drab gray prison uniform. We walked the long corridor, past all the empty barred cages, to the last cell, the only one that was occupied . . .

My thoughts were a million miles and twenty years away. My reverie was interrupted when I realized the prison warden was speaking. ". . . yes, I was aware that Johnson was visiting the prison. I've known that as a social worker he's been involved with prison work for some time. I've heard a lot of good things about him.

"It never occurred to me that he was related to the Johnson who was executed some twenty years ago. That was my first year as warden.

"Johnson—the social worker, I mean—was just a kid then. But I guess it's in the blood, or something."

Then I heard someone, I think it was my attorney, say, "Objection, Your Honor. That is purely conjecture."

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 479th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . It is to the credit of this first story that every reader on our staff thought it was a real letter to the editor . . .

The author, Carolyn T. Crew, is fifty, "a mixture of housewife, mother, and poultry farmer for the past twenty-three years." She and her husband have "a wonderful grown-up son and daughter, fifteen cats, and 25,000 chickens." Prior to marriage she wrote for a small-town newspaper, and did some secretarial work and bookkeeping. She loves to read, listen to music, do needlework, collect stamps, and write light verse, especially limericks . . .

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

by CAROLYN T. CREW

Hamilton A. Phelps, Editor
Crime Magazine
New York City, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

The manuscript of my latest mystery story (the 47th I've submitted to your magazine) was returned to me today with the customary printed rejection slip expressing your customary printed regrets.

Well, I've had it. Since you're obviously not going to buy any of my stuff anyhow, I have nothing to lose by a precise expression of my feelings about magazines and their editors. I'm giving up this crazy dream I've had all my life of becoming an author. I'll get into some other line of work where the only writing I'll have to do is endorse my paycheck.

Although I'm aware that you couldn't care less, I may as well finish what I've wanted to get off my chest for a long, long time.

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If you haven't already stopped reading, here are some questions that need asking:

Do you have any idea what it's like to rack your brain searching for an original idea, then write your heart out and your fingers off, polishing the words to perfection, building up hope that this one will surely be accepted, only to have it come back as unerringly as a boomerang? Forty-seven times? In your air-conditioned ivory tower, can you even begin to imagine that much frustration?

Do you know the agony of being both hungry and unpublished, when your magazine is full of stories not nearly so clever or so well-written as mine? Do you?

Yours truly,
Vernon P. Bertram

Dear Mr. Bertram:

It is always sad to see someone relinquish the dream of a lifetime.

I have read your questions with interest, and I have one of my own for you:

Why do you think I became an editor?

Yours truly,
Hamilton A. Phelps
Editor

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

GETTING STOUT: "Maitre d'tective: Rex Stout," a special gourmet dinner to honor the memory of Rex Stout and to herald the publication of his authorized biography, the definitive *Rex Stout* (Little, Brown, $15) by John J. McAleer, has been planned for Thursday, November 3, at 6:30 P.M. The banquet will be held in New York City at the Lotos Club's magnificent mansion near Fifth Avenue (5 East 66th Street). The menu will be based on *The Nero Wolfe Cook Book* and be prepared by the Lotos Club's chef. The price of $37.50 includes cocktails, wine with dinner, and brandy after it. And, of course, an orchid for the lady. For reservations and further information, write Carol Brener, Murder Ink, 271 West 87th Street, New York, N.Y. 10024.

GETTING RAILROADED: There is a magical quality about trains that is somehow lacking in planes, buses, and automobiles. Maybe Agatha Christie, Eric Ambler, and the Orient Express are responsible, but aficionados of mystery stories often seem to retain a warm spot in their hearts for travel by rail, regarding it with a romantic nostalgia unshared by people who prefer science fiction or books on gardening. What could be more natural, then, than an anthology of mystery tales with railroad backgrounds? Bill Pronzini got on the right track and put one together. *Midnight Specials* (Bobbs-Merrill, $10.95) contains some of the finest mystery writers of the past hundred years, ranging from Dickens and Twain to Irvin S. Cobb, James M. Cain, and Cornell Woolrich, to Robert Bloch, Edward D. Hoch, Ellery Queen, and Pronzini himself. In addition to containing excellent stories, the book is lavishly produced, a joy to the eye as well as the mind.

GETTING PLASTERED: Here is something for the private-eye fan who has everything: A Maltese falcon. Not *the* Maltese falcon, but a pretty good imitation. The magnificent gold, gem-encrusted statue of the black bird, for which Casper Gutman searched most of his adult life (and, to keep it in

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perspective, to which Sam Spade referred as the "dingus") cannot be yours. But an impressive plaster replica of the foot-high *objet d'art,* which looks exactly like the one Humphrey Bogart played with in the film version of *The Maltese Falcon,* is offered for $20 (postpaid) from Figurines, 2964 North Lincoln Ave., Chicago, Il. 60657.

GETTING SMART: A strange book for this column is the rather academic *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence* (Harper & Row, $4.95), a paperback anthology of non-fiction pieces edited by Robin W. Winks, a Yale professor. The prospect of reading more than 500 pages of essays by professional historians sounds terribly intimidating, not to mention a trifle stodgy, but that would be a misconception. This cornucopia analyzes the techniques of detection; the difference is that these detectives are seeking information, not criminals. Deftly drawing parallels between the methodology of the private, amateur, and official detectives of fiction and the real-life historian, beginning with the gathering of data, continuing with the deductions which can be made from them, and concluding with the evidence which then can be presented to form a convincing case, this volume will be of interest to anyone concerned with the serious aspects of detection.

GETTING THE POINT: The (British) Crime Writers Association has announced the winners of its "Dagger" awards for the best crime novels of the year, and no one could argue its choices. The top honor, the Gold Dagger, went to Ruth Rendell for *A Demon in My View;* the Silver Dagger for the runner-up position was presented to James McClure for *Rogue Eagle.* It has been learned that McClure stabbed himself with his own dagger during the ceremony. Perhaps the story should be left at that point, but the explanation is simply that he put the dagger in his pocket—point up. He later reached for something in the same pocket and shed the first blood of the evening.

GETTING THE SHORT END: A few issues back, I stated that the stories in David Fletcher's book, *Raffles* (Putnam, $7.95) were good. That judgment was, alas, made in haste. A more careful reading reveals these stories to be nothing more than rewrites of E. W. Hornung's original tales of the famous amateur cracksman. Same plots, same characters, same everything. Hornung's stories served as the basis for a British television series written by Philip Mackie. The stories in this misleading collection are merely fictionalizations of those dramatic scripts, as written by Fletcher (a pseudonym of Dulan Barber). You would do far better to pick up the Penguin edition of *Raffles* by Hornung ($1.95). Sorry if you were led astray.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

The distinguished Miss Helen Hayes, in her seventies and long honored as the "first lady of the American stage," is no stranger to playing elderly busybodies in whodunits, having done a television season costarring in *The Snoop Sisters.* Now Warner's TV Studios has contracted her to play the archetypal spinster investigator, Agatha Christie's Jane Marple. Rights have not yet been quite nailed down with the Christie estate, but Warner programming president Alan Shayne has been negotiating with the author's daughter and grandson in Devonshire and hopes this Fall to produce telefeatures of *The Mirror Crack'd* and *A Caribbean Mystery.* Miss Hayes would certainly differ in impersonation from the Marple of the 1960s, Margaret Rutherford (somewhat too whimsical); but Shayne has not yet come to a decision on two important points: whether the films will be shot in England or at the studio's Burbank lot, and whether the "period" will be contemporary or the more placid Britain of the detective story's "golden age."

Can it be so many years since Hayley Mills played the plucky teenaged heroine of Mary Stewart's *The Moon-Spinners?* (Actually, the film was released in 1964.) Now she has matured into the cowed, nameless second wife in a stage dramatization of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca,* debuting at Toronto's venerable Royal Alexandra Theatre prior to an American tour. The brooding drama has been confined to a single set—the impressive main hall of Manderley, which surprisingly does *not* burn down, so audiences may feel robbed of the smoke-effects and spectacle of a rousing, climactic conflagration. The finish is far more melodramatic in the New York off-Broadway revival of Augustin Daly's 1867 *Under the Gaslight* (not seen for 75 years), a rich tapestry of villainy and one of the first plays in which a person is tied to railroad tracks just before a train lumbers onstage!

In a more modern vein, the Airline Theater Wing has just presented talented new playwright Eckert Alleman's then-there-were-none mystery variant, *Scenario of Death,* which opens with a clever mixed-media burst and uses videotape playback machines as part of its murder plot and terrifying finale. And well-known performer Frank Langella, who toured this summer as *Sherlock Holmes,* will be Dracula soon on Broadway in an expensively mounted, Gothic restaging—*straight*—of the familiar play.

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Our passion is, of course, international. Recently this year European crime writers met in a Copenhagen congress, and among the talks was a panel on the future of the crime novel with Len Deighton, Julian Symons, American visitor Robert L. Fish, and others. Chairman K. Arne Blom *(The Moment of Truth)* had this to say: "The crime novel is a very useful tool for writers wanting to describe, analyze, and explain our time, our kind of society and human beings now. There is no reason whatsoever to regard the crime novel as a lower kind of literature compared to what is sometimes called real literature." Bloody good vision.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

William McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* (Pantheon, $7.95) is the first in a new series of Glasgow-based police novels. An award-winning mainstream novelist, McIlvanney bears comparison with the giants in his first mystery. He writes a poet's prose, full of human truth, sharp scenes with the bite of reality and a pervasive sense of menace. He even brings wit, grace, and originality to the most stereotyped event of most mystery novels (in fact, most novels)—the sexual encounter.

Abrasive, compassionate, and enigmatic, protagonist Laidlaw is a character well worth meeting again and learning more about. His first case may be regarded as a crime fiction cornerstone in the years to come. (*****)

It has been a year for outstanding debuts. David Linzee's *Death in Connecticut* (McKay-Washburn, $7.95) seems a sure Edgar contender for best American first mystery. Set in 1971 (and thus almost a historical novel), it examines the last decade's generation gap from the youth side, rare in mystery novels. Drop-out Arthur Lavien returns after several years on the road (draft-dodging) to reenter the lives of his establishment lawyer father and Radcliffe-grad girl friend, both of whom he comes to suspect of drug dealing. The novel passes muster in all of the elements necessary for first-rate crime fiction—plot, pace, style, and characterization—but it is strongest in the last area, where many mysteries are weakest. (****)

**** Anthony Price: *War Game,* Doubleday Crime Club, $7.95. The timely discovery of a hidden gold hoard and murder during an English Civil War battle reenactment are among the elements of David Audley's latest adventure, a lit-

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erate and beautifully plotted mixture of espionage and detection. The generous chunks of military history will delight some readers and discourage others.

*** Martin Russell: *The Man Without a Name*, Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, $7.95. The opening situation is a real grabber: John Tiverton comes home one day to find his wife has never seen him before. Friends, business associates, even his mother agree that the Tiverton *they* knew died six months ago. Can the author explain this without resorting to science fiction. the occult, or unacceptable improbabilities? Russell manages it, or near enough.

*** Ragan Butler: *Captain Nash and the Honour of England*, St. Martin's, $6.95. The second in a promising new historical series is even livelier than the first, full of delightful and earthy period dialogue, exciting action, and a vivid picture of the England of 1772.

*** Gene Thompson: *Lupe*, Random House, $8.95. The second example in recent months of an occult courtroom novel (following Terrel Miedaner's *The Soul of Anna Klane)* tells of a witchcraft trial in contemporary San Francisco. Thompson produces some genuine chills, though readers who favor legal novels will regret that the trial is not allowed to finish and go to the jury.

Michael Brett's *Diamond Kill* (Putnam, $7.95) is a fast and readable caper novel involving the knocking over of the whole New York diamond exchange. The carnage is considerable. (***) British series spy Mark Farrow makes a solid American debut in Angus Ross' *The Ampurias Exchange* (Walker, $6.95), set in Spain—there are Basque terrorists, border crossings, lots of action, and enough gourmet food descriptions to make one wonder if Ross doubles as a restaurant critic. (***) In *The Second Vanetti Affair* (Doubleday Crime Club, $6.95), Marc Lovell (Mark McShane) offers a sequel to last year's *The Blind Hypnotist*, which should be read first at all costs. Actress Elsie Vanetti is kidnaped again, but this time hypnotist Jason Galt is detective rather than kidnaper. Though not quite up to its predecessor, it's good entertainment, and the final twist is a beauty. (***)

Bill Knox's Scottish cops Thane and Moss are in good form in *Pilot Error* (Doubleday Crime Club, $6.95), beginning with the crash of a private plane in a Glasgow housing development. (***) But Leonard Holton's unbelievable and all-too-sweetly-dovetailed *A Corner of Paradise* (St. Martin's, $7.95) can be recommended only to old and faithful friends of Father Bredder and Lt. Minardi. (**)

With its 1940 s Hollywood private eye, blackmailed film studio, and movie star personal appearances (most notably by Errol Flynn), Stuart Kaminsky's *Bullet for a Star* (St. Martin's, $7.95) may be the least original mystery of

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the year. But it moves right along and goes over the familiar jumps smoothly enough. (**) Gary Brandner also covers ofttrod ground in his occult mystery *The Howling* (Fawcett-Gold Medal, $1.75), but his solid professionalism makes it entertaining and readable. The most memorable scene is hilarious rather than terrifying—the efforts of one of the characters to procure a necessary weapon in werewolf-fighting. (**)

Edward D. Hoch's selection of the *Best Detective Stories of the Year—1977* (Dutton, $8.95), his second and the series' 31st volume, gathers 16 stories, eight from EQMM and four from AHMM. It's a fine collection without a single weak entry. Five or six are detective stories, by strict definition, making the title less of a misnomer than in some years.

Among the reprints, Isaac Asimov's 1976 novel *Murder at the ABA* (Fawcett-Crest, $1.75) is a fair-play mystery of the old school and a fine one. Novelist Darius Just, said to resemble Harlan Ellison, investigates a murder at the 1975 American Booksellers Association convention.

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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNT PRICE
Alverson, Charles	NOT SLEEPING, JUST DEAD	Houghton, Mifflin	$7.95	$6.35
Bloom, Murray Teigh	THE 13TH MAN	Macmillan	8.95	6.95
Brett, Michael	DIAMOND KILL	Putnam	7.95	6.35
Butler, Ragan	CAPTAIN NASH AND THE HONOUR OF ENGLAND	St. Martin's	6.95	5.50
Cullinan, Thomas	THE EIGHTH SACRAMENT	Putnam	7.95	6.35
Curtiss, Ursula	IN COLD PURSUIT	Dodd, Mead	6.95	5.50
Di Mona, Joseph	THE BENEDICT ARNOLD CONNECTION	Morrow	8.95	6.95
Edited by Ellery Queen	FACES OF MYSTERY	Dial Press	8.95	6.95
Forbes, Colin	AVALANCHE EXPRESS	Dutton	8.95	6.95
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Edited by Penzler, Otto Steinbrunner, Chris and Lachman, Marvin	DETECTIONARY	Overlook Press (Viking)	15.00	12.00
Price, Anthony	WAR GAME	Doubleday Crime Club	7.95	6.35
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Additional reviews on page 72

REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

IN COLD PURSUIT, by Ursula Curtiss. Dodd, Mead, $6.95.

Mary Vaughan and her cousin Jenny set off for a vacation in Juarez, hoping to elude Jenny's unsuitable and resentful former fiancé, Brian. Not only does Brian discover their destination but so does a man who has mistakenly identified Mary as the woman who caused his wife's death. Here is an absorbing novel about a bewildered woman who does not know who is threatening her life or why, by the author of such recent titles as *The Birthday Gift* and *Letter of Intent.*

"The many fans attracted to Curtiss's stylish thrillers will certainly take to her latest."—*Publishers Weekly*

DETECTIONARY, produced by Roseman and edited by Penzler, Steinbrunner, and Lachman. The Overlook Press, $15.00.

The *Detectionary,* a biographical dictionary listing of major characters in detective fiction, is the ultimate whodunit.

This enjoyable reference volume of fictitious criminality not only tells you who did it but who solved it, who assisted, who created the peculiar characters and the cases they solved, as well as who made it into motion pictures. Divided with a light touch into four sections—detectives, rogues and helpers, cases, and movies, *Detectionary* is a unique survey of mystery fiction. 200 illustrations.

"Great fun to wander through."—*Joan Kahn*

"The ultimate reference volume of mystery fiction."—*Publishers Weekly*

FACES OF MYSTERY, Edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.

This hardcover edition of *Ellery Queen's Anthology #34* includes a short novel by the magnetic Rex Stout, 3 novelets by the intriguing Georges Simenon, Lawrence G. Blochman, and Julian Symons, and 14 stories by such enduring talents in the mystery field as Dick Francis, Hugh Pentecost, Michael Gilbert, Robert L. Fish, Patricia Highsmith, and Ellery Queen.

The collection mirrors a variety of crimes, characters, and settings —all brought together by the ingenious editor in whose magazine most of the stories first appeared.

UNKNOWN MAN NO. 89, by Elmore Leonard. Delacorte, $8.95.

Leonard was praised for his other novels featuring the cool process server, Frank Ryan. The third adventure is equally well told and gripping but decidedly not for the queasy. Ryan is offered a huge fee by a swindler, Perez, just to locate a black killer and thief, Leary. Leary has inherited a fortune which Perez is plotting to collect. Ryan finds the missing man, an identified body at the morgue. He has been shot by Virgil, a robber he, in turn, has cheated. Perez then assigns Ryan to find Leary's widow. Denise, a young white girl and a wino. The tracer befriends her at an AA meeting and they fall in love. Now Ryan changes sides. He begins to plan ways of getting the money, legally hers, to Denise. With wily Virgil and Perez's hired gun after them, the lovers are in dire straits.

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a *NEW* suspense story by

DOROTHY SIMPSON

We are happy to greet Dorothy Simpson to the pages of EQMM. Her first appearance here is a gripping tale in the trend of today—in the current fascination with the occult which is so popular in movies and television . . .

THE WISP OF SOUND

by DOROTHY SIMPSON

Joan did not approve of the transistor radio. Her Puritan soul recoiled from the idea of giving such an expensive and unsuitable present to a child of nine. Nevertheless, watching the two heads, one silver-gray, one silver-blond, bent over the neat little black and chromium box, she could not bring herself to remonstrate, to spoil her mother's pleasure in the gift, her son's delight in his birthday present. If only mother had consulted her before buying it. . . But she hadn't and it was pointless now to regret a *fait accompli.* She would just have to make the best of it and hope that the novelty would soon wear off.

But it didn't. Like Mary's little lamb, everywhere that Paul went the radio went too. It accompanied him to bed at night, came downstairs with him each morning, sat on the table beside his plate at mealtimes, and lay on his lap whenever he and Joan went out in the car. Patiently Joan bided her time, confident that in a few days, perhaps a week at the most, Paul would lose interest in it and turn to something more satisfying, more constructive. Though she did think it rather odd that he seemed to be content just to carry it about with him and appeared never to switch it on.

"You do know how to work it, don't you, darling?" she asked one day, her voice deliberately casual.

"Yes, thank you, Mummy."

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But he still made no attempt to do so.

Surreptitiously she began to watch him and it was not long before she realized that it was not so much that he never switched it on, but that he never did so in her presence. She would catch a glimpse of him in the distance, sitting under the apple tree perhaps, hunched earnestly over the radio in his lap, his lips moving as if he were repeating what he heard. Or she would catch a remote whisper of sound as she passed his bedroom door—which, oddly enough, he now always kept firmly closed, even at night.

But if ever she approached him or opened his door while he was listening, he would switch off at once, before she had an opportunity to find out which program so engrossed him. It made her feel curiously excluded, and as the days went by, more and more bereft.

By the time Robert came home from London at the weekend, she was feeling distinctly uneasy. "I don't like it," she told him. "There's something almost—well, creepy about it."

He laughed and put his arms around her, looking reassuringly sane, sensible, confident. "Darling, aren't you being just a little irrational?"

She shook her head stubbornly, refusing to be comforted.

"I really can't see what you're getting so worked up about. Paul's always been like this, passionately attached to new possessions."

Possessions. . . the word echoed frighteningly along the corridors of her mind.

"Well, hasn't he?" demanded Robert, with more than a trace of impatience in his voice now.

"I suppose so," she conceded reluctantly.

"She supposes so!" Robert rolled his eyes upward in mock despair. "You *know* so, you mean," he amended. "Remember his tricycle?"

She remembered it very well indeed, the tears and the tantrums when they had refused to allow Paul to take it to bed with him. She nodded reluctantly. "Yes, but. . ."

"But, nothing. Haven't we always found in the past that he loses interest once the novelty has worn off?"

Her own hope exactly. "Yes, I know, but. . ."

"Well, there you are then. Why should it be any different this time?"

Joan shook her head helplessly. "I don't know." That was the

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trouble, she *didn't* know. And it was this uncertainty which was eating away at her peace of mind in a way she had never experienced before. "It's just that he's so . . . obsessed by it."

"Oh, come on, darling. 'Obsessed' is a bit strong, isn't it?"

"No," cried Joan, "it's not. It's exactly the right word. There seems to be no room in his mind for any other interest."

"Well, give him time. How long has he had it? Five days? Give him another week and then, if you still feel the same, we'll do something about it."

"You mean, take it away from him?" Suddenly, for no apparent reason, Joan was frightened.

"Why not, if we feel it's the right thing to do? But I honestly don't think it'll come to that. By next weekend his 'obsession' will have faded to nothing more than a cursory interest." He paused, then added gently, "Honestly, love, that's how it will be, just wait and see."

And with this she had to be content.

But the conversation had given her no reassurance at all and after Robert had driven away on Sunday evening, the doubts came creeping back. Paul had gone straight up to his bedroom after waving goodbye to his father and the house felt strangely empty. Joan wandered restlessly from room to room, plumping up cushions, folding newspapers, emptying ashtrays. There was nothing interesting on television and after several abortive attempts to settle down to a book, she abandoned the pretense that everything was normal.

What was Paul doing up there?

The silence in the house was dense, oppressive, almost tangible. Impelled by a force outside her will, Joan rose and moved silently to the foot of the stairs. She stood, head tilted to one side, listening.

Nothing.

Without making a conscious decision, she began to creep up the stairs, her eyes fixed on the closed door of Paul's bedroom. Halfway up she became aware of a thin thread of sound and she paused, straining to distinguish what it was. No, not music . . . and yet the sound was too high for human speech.

Her sense of unease grew stronger and as she drew closer to the blank white surface of the door, it seemed as though all her senses but that of hearing had ceased to exist, as though the whole of her mind, her intelligence, her very being, were focused

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on that unintelligible wisp of sound. She stretched out her hand and with infinite care grasped the doorknob.

There was a sudden clatter and the sound of the radio was abruptly cut off. Stupefied, she looked down at the scatter of building blocks at her feet. How could she not have noticed them? And then, almost at once, came the suspicion. Had they been placed there intentionally?

She stood frozen, still gripping the doorknob. Should she retreat, or go in as if nothing had happened? Shock still numbed her mind and with an effort she forced herself to think rationally. If she went away now, Paul would know that she had been trying to creep up on him. She did not know why this thought was unbearable, but it was. Swiftly she twisted the knob and put her head around the door.

"Ah, there you are, Paul." Her own voice, falsely cheerful, filled her with self-disgust. "You were so quiet I wondered where you'd got to."

The door opened back against the head of the bed, an arrangement which dated from the time when Paul had wanted his door ajar at night and the landing light left on, but had not been able to sleep with it shining directly into his eyes. He was sitting on the bed with his back to the door, the radio in his lap. Now he twisted his head to look over his shoulder at his mother. But "look" she thought was the wrong word, for his gaze seemed to go through and beyond her, to be fixed on some unimaginably remote point outside the small cluttered room. He did not speak.

In the face of that look Joan's façade of reassurance crumbled. "So long as you're all right," she muttered and backed out of the room, closing the door softly behind her. Outside, she stood for a moment with the back of her hand pressed against her mouth, fighting the waves of panic which paralyzed her. Then, with desperate urgency, she broke into a stumbling run along the corridor.

In her bedroom she seized her own transistor radio, and with hands which were still shaking, carefully and methodically began to tune in to every station she could find. At the end of ten minutes she gave up. There was nothing, nothing at all which resembled even remotely that strange, incomprehensible sound.

Later, when she went back downstairs, she noticed that the building blocks in Paul's doorway had been replaced by a fleet of toy cars, meticulously set out in a block some two feet square.

She slept badly that night. As she lay awake, staring into the

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darkness, her mind moved compulsively in ever-recurring circles of dread and suspicion. Even now she could not (or dared not?) formulate her fear. But it was there all the same, lying beneath the surface of her mind like some unimaginably hideous primeval monster.

Over and over again she rebuked herself for being so stupidly hysterical over something so trivial. Was it not, as Robert had said, perfectly natural that Paul should be preoccupied with his new toy? (Toy?) And had he not always been a rather reserved, withdrawn child with a strong sense of privacy?

But still she could not shake off her sense of impending disaster and the gray morning light was seeping into her room before her exhausted mind at last released its hold on consciousness and allowed her to drift into an uneasy sleep.

She sat down to breakfast next morning with her mind made up. The time for reticence, she had decided, was past. It was all very well, this policy of non-interference, but it had gone too far. Her courage bolstered by the peaceful familiarity of the sunny kitchen and the sight of Paul helping himself to corn flakes like any healthy, normal nine-year-old, she launched on her new policy.

"What's your favorite program, Paul?" she asked brightly, gesturing toward the radio, which stood as usual beside his plate. She caught the startled, wary gleam in his eyes before he lowered them once more to his corn flakes. Deliberately, he took a large mouthful and chewed.

"Well, which is it?" she persisted. The corners of her mouth trembled with the effort of maintaining a bright expectant smile.

He swallowed and the thin shoulders rose in a slight expressive shrug. "Don't know, really."

"Oh, come on darling. You must have some idea by now."

But he merely shook his head and went on eating his cereal.

Suppressing the impulse to snatch his spoon away and shake him until he answered, Joan swallowed hard and tried again, her voice deliberately casual. "You certainly seemed very engrossed in that program last night. What was it?"

She forced herself to spoon up some cereal but dared not put it into her mouth. Her throat seemed to have closed up as she waited for his reply.

But he merely shrugged again. His cereal finished, he laid his spoon in the dish and glanced hopefully toward the cooker, where

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his bacon and egg were already set out on a plate. "Can I have my next course, Mummy?" he asked.

"No, you may not have your next course," snapped Joan. "Not until you've had the courtesy to answer my question." At once she regretted her loss of temper. There would be little hope now of learning anything useful. "What was it?" she repeated.

"What was what?"

Beneath the table Joan's hands curled into frustrated fists. "The program you were listening to last night," she said tightly.

And then it happened again. The same blue, paralyzing stare, seeming to pierce, to transfix her, stripping her of both dignity and authority.

She wondered later what she would have done if, at that moment, the doorbell had not rung. As it was she pushed back her chair and rose. "Oh, never mind," she muttered, and with relief escaped.

Although she thought about it endlessly, obsessively, she could not bring herself to raise the subject again. The mere memory of that look reduced intention to impotence. Several times she was on the point of ringing Robert at the office, desperate to pour out her fears to him, but each time pride prevented her.

What sort of a woman was she if she could not cope with her own child just for a few more days? For, despite her initial reaction to Robert's suggestion that they might take Paul's radio away from him, she had now decided that this was the only solution to the problem. But, helplessly aware of her cowardice, she knew she would have to wait for Robert to come home; she could not do it alone.

As if aware that the battle with his mother was over almost before the engagement had begun, over the next few days Paul continued to go his own way with blatant unconcern. He appeared now only at mealtimes, spending the rest of the day shut up in his room, his confidence reflected by the fact that he no longer bothered to erect barricades in his doorway.

Joan, at first unable to settle down to anything constructive, threw herself into an unseasonable frenzy of spring cleaning. Even so, despite her physical exhaustion, she found herself lying awake night after night, staring into the darkness. And when she did eventually manage to sleep, she was haunted by a recurring nightmare in which disembodied voices tormented her, their volume swelling to deafening, unbearable proportions so that she

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would awake sweating, to find that there were still many hours of seemingly endless darkness to be endured before daylight.

She awoke from just such a dream in the early hours of Friday morning, the voices still echoing in her ears.

Or was it an echo?

She lay rigid, listening with breathless concentration. Yes, there it was again. She sat up, swung her legs over the side of the bed, and padded across to the door. Her questing fingers found the knob and turned it softly. Faint dim light seeped into the room from a landing usually pitch-dark.

Cautiously she opened the door a little wider and edged into the opening. Peering out, she was overcome by a suffocating wave of excitement which left her limbs weak and trembling, her heart pounding erratically. For Paul's door, which had clearly slipped its catch, was fractionally ajar, the light from within slanting through the crack and casting a dim glow along the landing. And, more clearly than she had ever heard it before, came the sound which had so puzzled and frightened her on Sunday evening, distinguishable now as a strange, high-pitched, staccato babble.

Scarcely daring to breathe, she crept softly across the intervening space. Once she froze, hearing Paul's voice, certain that her approach had been detected. But what he said was unintelligible, a sleeper's jumble of unrecognizable syllables. After the initial shock the sound comforted her, offering her a rational explanation: he had fallen asleep with the radio on.

The thought spurred her onward. Here at last was the perfect opportunity to find out which program was having this strange effect upon him. But still she was very careful to make no sound. She could not bear the thought of being disappointed again.

When she reached his door she stood for a moment gathering courage and then carefully inserting the fingertips of her left hand into the crack, she gripped the edge of the door and began to ease it open, inch by careful inch. As soon as the gap was wide enough, she took one deep fortifying breath and peered into the room.

She saw at once that Paul was not asleep but sitting cross-legged on the bed with the radio on his lap, his back toward her as on the previous occasion. As her head came around the door, he spoke again and this time there was something about his speech which was, although still unintelligible, elusively familiar. He paused, and into the silence came at once a response from the

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radio. Realization came to Joan in a blinding flash of illumination: Paul's speech sounded familiar because, in a lower register, he was using those same staccato sounds.

They were having a conversation.

For a few moments she clung speechless to the door and then terror, anger, and a desperate sense of loss came welling up to erupt in a terrible cry. "Paul! What are you doing? Give me that thing. *Give it to me*!"

Part of her detached itself and watched as, with an appalled awareness that she was no longer directing her own actions, that she was being controlled by some agency outside and beyond herself, she tore the little black box from her son's protective grasp, hurled it onto the floor, and brought one foot down on it with all the strength she could muster. Again and again she ground her heel into the unrecognizable jumble of metal, wire, and plastic. Finally, breathless, she straightened up and turned to face the motionless small figure on the bed.

And it was with a terrible sense of inevitability that she became aware of a new permanence in that remote, transfixing stare and recognized the voice of that Other issuing now from the lips of her son.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Alverson, Charles	NOT SLEEPING, JUST DEAD	Houghton Mifflin Co.	$7.95	10/3
Roueché, Berton	FAGO	Harper & Row	8.95	10/5

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a *NEW* short story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

There are creative-writing teachers who insist that a commercial or professional story must "hook the reader" in the very first sentence or paragraph. Whether or not your Editor believes this dictum (and you can judge for yourself by reading any issue of EQMM), Ernest Savage's newest story is a test of that rule. Read the first sentence-paragraph—and then stop if you can . . .

EIGHT O'CLOCK FERRY

by *ERNEST SAVAGE*

Monroe Perkins had barely got into the house from the blear gray night outside, and had barely settled into his comfortable TV chair, when he stood up abruptly, stared at the TV screen, clutched his chest, and fell back into his chair, dead.

His wife Martha, who had said nothing to him when he entered the house because she had known where he had been all afternoon and the early part of the evening (with that bimbo Hetty, or Lettie, or whatever her name was), scarcely noticed from the corner of her eye her husband's final fatal act. Her attention, compromised briefly for that instant, was again full on the TV screen.

The announcer, with the words *NEWS BULLETIN* boldly printed below his quite unprofessionally agitated face, was repeating for the third time, in somewhat expanded detail, that a United States Navy minesweeper had just moments ago rammed and sunk the ferryboat, *Estelle Bonner,* in the middle of West Bay, and the loss of life, once known, would be nothing less than appalling. He seemed to be taking it personally.

Martha Perkins was annoyed. She had always felt that unless the BIG BOMB was on its way, there was no news bulletin that

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could not be safely deferred until the next commercial break, instead of, as in this case, cutting Rhoda off in mid-sentence. So what if a ferryboat got hit in the middle of West Bay? It wasn't the first time it had happened and it wouldn't be the last. Now she'd have to wait until the reruns to know what Rhoda had been about to say. The announcer was going on and on, someone handing him fresh sheets of paper every few moments.

Thoroughly exasperated now, Martha heaved her powerful, barrel-shaped body out of her chair and walked past her dead husband's feet to the front door and out into the night. From the center of the street in front of her house she gazed eastward toward the Bay, its waters lapping the foot of the street a hundred yards away; but she saw nothing—a heavy layer of swirling mist erased all features of the night save the dim light on the end of the dock that served their tacky, sparsely occupied street. The landing from which the *Estelle Bonner* had departed was four blocks north, just minutes away, but out of sight and sound. A siren wailed from some invisible point on the water.

Arms folded across her round shapeless front, she shivered and went back inside, stopping in front of her husband's chair. Behind her the announcer was blathering on, mentioning the possible number of victims, a hundred maybe, or perhaps twice that. As though they were all his very own.

"Monroe," she said, and knew at once that he was dead and took an involuntary step back. A great suck of air bellied out her chest and she released it slowly, absorbing the *fact* of his death, a possibility she'd never before considered. She didn't touch him, not needing to or wanting to. "You bum!" she said, her judgment on him in a single strangled word. *No insurance,* her mind told her, *not a dime, nothing!*

"Ah!" she said aloud, sleuth-like, her eyes dancing. "You put her on the eight o'clock ferry and then came home and heard this idiot on TV—" She recalled her corner-eyes vision of Monroe lurching up at the first announcement of the tragedy, then falling back. "You thought she'd been killed, this slut, this bimbo, and it killed you!" A flicker of jealousy now—*to think so much of someone that your heart stops in your chest!* Once it had been better for them, a long time ago. Tears filled her eyes, tears of anger and fear and a sudden rush of self-pity.

She began to pace the small shabbily furnished room, her powerful legs dragging with shock. "What will I do?" the inner voice

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asked. Whatever he was, we never starved—not quite; there was always some kind of roof over our heads, a bed to sleep in—*What will I do now?*

She stopped in front of him. "I did what I could," she said aloud, "you got to admit that. No matter how little you brought home, I had a hot meal for you every night, didn't I? A clean house. Your kid, I did my best for your kid, you got to admit that, Monroe." These things had to be said, to get the record straight. She'd never said them before.

She ran fingers through her short graying hair, wiped tears from her eyes with the palms of her stubby hands. "You bum!" she repeated. "You've left me on the beach now."

She went into the bedroom, got her purse from a bureau drawer, and counted the money in it. $4.20. Maybe a buck in change in the jar in the kitchen, plus whatever Monroe had in his pants, which wouldn't be much because it never was. She went back in the living room and stood before his chair again, and reached out but couldn't touch. Her hand withdrew. They hadn't touched each other in years.

"I was always a big woman," she told him softly. "I was a big woman when you married me. How come you been chasing after these little sticks of things all these years? And you with your weak heart."

The TV announcer, his voice husky with anguish now, said early reports indicated there would be few survivors of the tragedy. The *Estelle Bonner* had blown up on impact, the two halves sinking like stones to the bottom of the Bay. The small screen of the black and white TV was filled with a jumble of lights criss-crossing the middle of the fog-bound Bay, a camera somewhere trying to find the center of things, the announcer's waning voice still audible.

Her mind was calmer now, in the grip of a cool rational fear. Who would want a 55-year-old truck of a woman who knew only to cook, clean house, wait, and worry? With no money, no skills, nothing to sell?

She looked at the phone. She should call someone, she knew, but who? Monroe had had no regular job for years, no boss who would miss him in the morning. He odd-jobbed, tended bar here and there, painted a house occasionally, won a little at cards now and again.

Billy should know, of course. Monroe's son. And maybe he'd

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know what to do, whom to tell. She went quickly into the kitchen at the rear of the small house and looked out the window over the sink. She saw a blurred line of pale pink framing the drawn shade of the window in the old garage out back. Billy was there, or he'd left the light on again as he usually did when he was gone.

He was there. He was seated at a small desk in front of the window, a large Tiffany-style shade made of vari-colored paper, fringed around the edge, hanging on a bare wire over his head, its 75-watt bulb strewing a soothing rosy glow over what he called his pad.

The lid from a mayonnaise jar was overflowing with cigarette butts on the desk, a half pack of Kent Golden Lights next to it, a half-smoked reefer on top of the pack of Kents. Squared neatly away. In front of him on the desk was a legal-size pad of lined yellow paper, across the top of which he had recently written: "Roses are red, violets are blue, I love me and so should you." He had scratched out the second half of this couplet and written beneath it: "I love you and you do too."

He gazed at his work and found it wanting. Not sharp enough—he'd been off the mark consistently the last few days. Worry. Billy Perkins had been writing sentiments for greeting-card publishers the last year of his 22, and selling a few. And gag lines for cartoonists, and selling a few of those too. Twenty-five bucks a crack on the average. He considered it a career about to take flight, but the money, the *real* money, he knew, was in running your own shop, doing your own printing and distribution, the whole bag. That's what he was worrying about.

A couple of months ago, across the Bay in the City, he'd met a cartoonist, Pete Watkins, with a real sense of the grotesque, a real knack for drawing those broken-down old ladies on the fronts of insult cards. They'd worked up some together and sold a few. The best money of all was in insult cards, the good ones, the *really* sharp ones. You get those out at a buck a throw, with maybe 40 or 50 cents profit, a couple of thousand of those spread across the country, and—man!

He and Pete had worked out the business end over the last month, the dollars and cents end. Two or three grand would set them up, they figured, their own shop and a girl, maybe, to handle the books. That afternoon over at Pete's they'd smoked a

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couple of joints and drifted with it, let it shape up, let it find its own form, and it looked good. All they needed was some capital, a break, and then—man!

Billy stared at the roses-are-red stuff in front of him. It wasn't good, it didn't draw blood. Sometimes the ideas came to him in bunches, usually when he had a joint going, but the trouble when you had a joint going was getting them down before they floated away. Or sometimes he'd see some old battle-ax waddling down the street, or a drunk in the gutter down by the docks, and the whole thing would pop into his head, the cartoon, the gag and all. Man—!

He heard Martha knock on his door, turned his head slowly, and saw her come halfway in and stop. Soccer-ball head framed in snaggly gray hair, five-by-five tank-size body wrapped in an old dress, piano legs sticking below the sagging hem, big flat feet in pounded-down slippers—he saw Pete's cartoon of her in a flash and his line inside the card: "Your mother does *not* wear army boots." No, not sharp enough, no blood.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Your father's dead," she told him.

A guy in a coffin, laid out with a lily in his hand—Pete could fix it up. Below the cartoon on the front of the card, this line: "Having a wonderful time—" Inside: "Wish you were here."

Unlike his stepmother, Billy hadn't been afraid to touch the body and check for pulse. Another card: On the front an open grave; inside, this line: "We're ready when you are." No, no zing. But there were possibilities here—

Martha was going over again what happened. She hadn't had to tell him about the *Estelle Bonner* because it was still on TV. One of the few survivors being interviewed on the City-side landing was telling how it happened. "It just came up like that," he said, shivering under a blanket. "Bam! Nobody had a chance."

"He came in a little after eight," Martha said, "and hung his coat on the rack and sat down—where he is. Rhoda was about halfway through and then this announcement came over and your dad sorta jumped up and fell back—like he is. He thought she was dead, this what's-her-name, and it killed him on the spot. Lettie or Betty something."

"Nettie Cooper," Billy said abstractedly. He'd met her in a bar in the City last month with his old man. Not a bad sort. She'd

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laughed at a couple of his gags and bought him a drink.

"He put her on the boat and then came straight home," Martha said. "It wasn't the first time, either." Her voice wasn't bitter any longer, just husky with fear. "Billy," she said, "I have nothing, he left me nothing. Billy, you'll have to pay the rent next week." It was a plea.

"No," he said.

"Oh, Billy, look in his pants, maybe there's money in there."

"No," he said. "We leave him the way he is." He felt himself blow up with the idea in his head; he was suddenly ten feet tall. "Hand me his coat," he said.

"What?"

"We're gonna dress him up and take him out in the skiff and dump him in the Bay, Mamababy. Don't worry about the rent, he left us a bundle—or will. Man! Get his coat."

She handed it to him and he began putting his father's rubbery right arm through the sleeve. Martha watched him, her hands drawn up to her mouth like a distraught child's.

"His wallet," she said. "The money, Billy."

She hadn't understood it yet. He'd turned his father's body over to get at the second arm and a corner of the wallet peeked out of his left-hand hip pocket. He tucked it back in and glanced at her. Her hands had now dropped, her eyes and mouth opening wide; she was beginning to understand. "He left here a little before eight," Billy said. "That's the story. He was going to visit someone in the City—"

"The Wilsons," she said. "He was going to visit the Wilsons."

"Okay, good, the Wilsons. Nobody can prove different. He takes the eight o'clock ferry half the time anyway, just to get the hell out of here—right?"

"Yes, the Wilsons," she said, still searching for the feel of the thing.

"It doesn't matter," Billy said, "about no water in the lungs, he was dead before he hit the Bay—his bad heart. We can prove that from the medical records, no trouble. And then we sue, Martha." He straightened and looked at her, the coat part done. "You get the picture now? We sue. We sue the hell out of 'em! We sue the Navy, the City, the ferryboat company, the Harbor Patrol—we sue everybody in town! You get the picture now, Martha?"

"Yes." It was wrong, she knew, but so much was wrong in this world, and so little right. All I want is a widow's mite, she

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thought, just enough— "We should call the Wilsons now," she said, "and ask them if Monroe got there yet. We can say we weren't sure which ferry he took and were afraid he might have been on the eight o'clock. It would make it seem more real—"

"No. It's a good idea, but we'll do it when we get back. First we got to dump him. We'll take him about a quarter mile out. That'll put us about a half mile down current from the point of collision. They'll be finding bodies down there and along the south shore all week. It's foolproof. Get dressed, Martha."

"Just enough to live on. We don't want too much, Billy, we can't ask for too much. I couldn't—"

"Get dressed, Martha."

She went into her bedroom and came out a minute later with shoes on and a heavy woolen sweater.

"No," Billy said. "Wear your black coat." He studied her critically.

"Why? This is—"

"In case somebody sees us. Get your black coat." She turned and was in the bedroom door when he added, "And your purse," and she turned again.

"My purse? Why?"

"For the same reason—in case somebody sees us. We want to look natural."

"But who will see us, Billy? The street's empty and it's just a hundred yards down to the—"

"Do it!" he said sharply. "Just in case."

She continued on into the bedroom, peeling off her sweater. He opened the front door quickly, went outside to the middle of the street, and looked down toward the Bay, at the dock light glowing dimly through the shaggy mist. Not a soul stirred. Visibility on the Bay would be poor; there was no traffic straight out in front—all the action was still a half mile north. A perfect night for the work in hand, he thought, and how many chances does a man get in one lifetime?

Her idea to call the Wilsons was not bad, not bad at all. It would put icing on the cake. He'd do it first thing he got back, the bereaved son, orphaned in one fell beautiful swoop. And then he'd call the cops, his voice all choked up. Man—!

He went back in the house and Martha was waiting for him. She had on her black coat now, buttoned up the front like the skin of a sausage, her ratty little fur collar circling her throat,

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her big black oxfords on her feet, her lumpy old purse hanging from her arm. Some sight! Pete would love her; they would immortalize her later with a bunch of terrific cards.

"Ready," he said and grabbed his father under the arms and hoisted him up over his right shoulder, feeling his knees bend with the weight. Heavier than he thought.

Martha's face turned white. They were actually *doing* it. "We shouldn't," she said.

"Get the key to the oar locker," Billy said huskily, "and open the door."

"Billy, we shouldn't—"

"Dammit, do as I say!"

Martha took the oar-locker key from the nail on the front door frame, her hand suddenly shaking, then opened the door. She didn't have to be told to turn off the lights.

He followed her out, already breathing hard, and wondered for the first time if Martha could swim. Funny, in all these years he didn't know if Martha could swim or not, but probably she couldn't, he thought, every muscle straining now.

Harry Wilson, the mouthpiece of the phone cupped in his hand, turned to his wife and said, "Hey, Jean, was Monroe Perkins supposed to come over here tonight?"

Jean Wilson wrenched her eyes away from the TV screen for a second and said, "Not that I know of. Why?"

Harry said, "How about young Billy?"

"No. Why?"

"Hoo boy!" Harry breathed softly, then lifted the phone to his mouth. "Not that we know of, Martha," he said. "Why, what's up?" He had an inkling.

Martha was still cold. She had changed immediately on returning home; her wet things were hanging in the kitchen now, but she was still cold.

She'd done everything just right afterward, she told herself. She'd moored the skiff, locked it, put the oars back in the oar locker, and the key back on its nail, changed her clothes swiftly, and called Harry Wilson, just as though it had all been planned that way, almost rehearsed.

And now she phoned the police and told them she thought her husband and stepson had been on the *Estelle Bonner* and was

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there any news at all, any survivor list, her voice quavering in genuine fear and concern. She'd just got home, she told the officer, just heard about it, and he was sympathetic, gentle with her. He took her name, address, and phone number and suggested she keep the TV on for late news flashes, and please don't come to the station, somebody would check with her later.

She sat in her comfortable chair now, the TV off. She knew all she cared to know about the night's events—*more* than she cared to know, more than she could live with, she thought.

Poor Billy—why had he done it? She had felt he might try to kill her, but it surprised her anyway. Together they'd eased Monroe's body over the side of the skiff and then Billy had swung his fist at her and she'd grabbed his hand and they'd gone over the side together in a tangle of locked arms. The next few moments were a blur in her mind and always would be. Terror, panic in her heart, the shock of the cold water, her mouth clamped shut, her legs thrashing, the shoes like leaden weights, and then an eon later the surface and air, great gulps of it, and the feel of Billy's hand sliding down, his grip going soft, easing into nothing.

For a few minutes she'd floated there, getting her breath, and then she'd paddled over to the skiff and climbed aboard at the prow, the way—many years ago—her father had told her to. Never the side, he'd said—the prow or the stern, but never the side. Funny how those things stick with you—

Then she'd looked for Billy, but had known she wouldn't find him, known he was gone for good from the feel of his dying hand. But she'd looked anyway—

Sitting there at home then, suddenly, surprisingly, her heart quickened with a sense of triumph. She was alive, they were dead, *she* had won. Her breast lifted with a fresh sense of life's possibilities now—freedom, money, a new world. But it passed at once, tears starting in her eyes. She wanted so little, really.

She heard the knocking on the door and thought, "Oh, they've come to check already," and got up, dried her eyes, and opened the door, drawing her pink-quilted robe closed at the throat.

A woman stood there, a cab idling at the curb behind her. The woman smiled nervously, looking ill-at-ease in clothes much too large for her slender frame, a wool cap pulled down over hair that was still damp, her big dark eyes in an aging bony face. "I'm sorry," she said hesitantly. "I tried to call a while ago, but got no

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answer. You're Mrs. Perkins, aren't you?"

"And you're the bimbo," Martha said, quite certain of it. "What's-her-name, Lettie, Betty—"

"Nettie Cooper. I'm a friend of Monroe's. I knew—he'd worry, I wanted him to know—" Her eyes darted past Martha into the room. "Is he home?"

"No."

"Will you tell him, please?"

"That Nettie's okay?"

"Yes, please. We were just friends, Mrs. Perkins, that's all."

"It's okay," Martha said. "It's okay. Go home before you catch cold."

She closed the door and leaned against it. I'll be taken care of, she thought. A roof, a hot meal, a little TV. Maybe they've got a garden there to work in the summers. It's all I want, it's all I ever wanted—

Her sigh was a sigh of immense relief.

"Q"

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NOW HE THINKS HE'S DEAD

by *RON GOULART*

There was really very little left of him.

They finally figured out who he was. Then they began to wonder why his remains ended up where they did.

I could have told them, but I didn't. It's always been my policy, as you probably know, not to fool around with anything like this.

Beau Willet brought it on himself, more or less. His killer is still running around free, true enough, but the police have written Beau's death off as nothing more than a bizarre accident. It's best to leave the whole thing like that.

It was about a year ago that I first met Beau. We became friends, which is somewhat odd since I'd got in touch with him initially to offer him a bribe. Well, not a bribe exactly. Simply some money to stop writing about the actress we'd hired to do all our SoyHammy commercials. Less than a week after we'd signed the contract with Panky Zeffer, Beau had an item about her in his *Hollywood Daily* column. She'd been thrown out of a Beverly Hills boutique, Beau reported, for punching a salesgirl in the snoot, tossing an overpriced suitcase smack through a plate-glass window, and kneeing the store manager in the groin.

When old Mazden, he hadn't had his stroke then and was still running the whole SoyHammy operation, read that item he got on

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the phone from Chicago and howled. I, being the Account Supervisor on SoyHammy, had to listen to the howling, then go over and talk to our actress. That took a while because her maid couldn't find her right off.

I located the girl finally in the bathtub, fully clothed, and passed out, smelling strongly of Manhattans. I revived her, at least partially, and she admitted Beau had printed the truth. Having little hope of reforming Panky in the four days we had before we began shooting the commercials, I decided to approach Beau.

He was a middle-size man, slightly plumper than he appeared in the photo accompanying his column every day. About 34, he'd come down to Los Angeles from Portland, Oregon, eleven years before. Besides his column in the *Daily,* he did pieces for *TV Look* and *Newsmag.* The possibility of our SoyHammy girl's adventures also appearing in magazines with such large circulations unsettled me.

Beau, very politely for him, turned down my veiled offer to provide him some money if he didn't write about Panky Zeffer any more. "You know what your trouble is?" he asked at that first lunch, which took place at the Microwave Tamale on La Cienega.

"Beg pardon?"

"You hate your work."

"No, I don't. I love it," I insisted. "My work in the advertising profession has brought me numerous satisfactions—a spacious home, an enchanting wife, who by the way used to be a fashion—"

"I know that. I know everything about everybody," Beau cut in. "You won't get anywhere denying my insights into how your head works. Besides knowing lots about psychology on my own, I'm Lisa Rubinchek's Number One lover."

"Lisa Rubinchek? Oh, you mean Dr. Lisa Rubinchek."

"That Lisa Rubinchek, yeah. Don't you watch her show every night on KMA-TV? She's got the highest rating of any local show in the slot. Beats out *Bowling for Big Dough,* the *Chicano Hour,* and even the reruns of *Olaf's Pig.*"

"Very impressive," I said. "By being around her some of her pyschiatric experience rubs off?"

"If you ever catch my lady on *You Think You Got a Problem,* you know Lisa. Besides being one of the most stunning and willowy blondes in this goofy town she's a damn good shrink. With one exception."

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"I bet," I guessed, "that exception is you."

"You got it. Lisa's fantastically off base when it comes to figuring me out." He settled back against the serape-striped leatherette of the booth. "Immature, impulsive, lacking in judgment. Ha! Does that sum up Beau Willet? Well, you can't put too much faith in psychiatrists. Like that joke about the guy's wife who takes him to a shrink—you know the one?"

"I've heard most of—"

"She drags hubby in, informs the headdoctor that the guy is all the time sick, but regular medicos can't find a blessed thing wrong. So the psychiatrist gives the guy a forty-five-minute show-and-tell session. Then he has the wife in and explains there's nothing physically wrong with her husband, it's all in his mind. With a few more headshrinking sessions he'll be tip-top. 'He only thinks he's sick,' he says. 'Remember, he only *thinks* he's sick.' So a couple weeks pass and the patient doesn't come back. One day the shrink runs into the wife on the street and he asks her how her husband is. And she replies, 'Now he thinks he's dead.' " Beau chuckled, rubbing his hands together. "Very profound, right?"

"Well, to me—"

"Tell you something else. I'm pulling down $100,000 a year and I'm only thirty-two. More than you make, and you're pushing fifty."

"Actually I'm forty-four," I told him.

"Too much boozing in the bistros then, plus maybe some grabby time in the wee small hours. Gives your chin that sag it's got and makes those spooky hollows under your eyes," he explained, scrutinizing my face. "Speaking of that, do you know who I saw punch out the doorman at Karlo's Nudibar last midnight? None other than kindly old Mercer Fracklen, who plays Father Finnigan on ABC's top-rated *Saints Preserve Us.* Drunk out of his coco and swearing like a crazed sailor."

I was rubbing my chin. "I drink very moderately."

"Sure, sure, everybody claims that. Right before they fall off their stools." He grabbed up his serape-striped napkin. "Hey, you know what the next big fad is going to be in this wacky burg?"

"Probably something like—"

"Peewee golf. You heard me right. Miniature golf, the craze for it is going to be as big and lucrative as it was way back when in the dim dark days of the Depression. Lisa says I'm goofy, but my

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gut-feeling for business trends never fails me. I'm putting a wad into buying up six courses out in the Valley. It's the wave of the future."

Talc Henkel's name started showing up in Beau's *Now What?* column a couple of months later. By that time, as far as I've been able to find out, Henkel was already Beau's chief rival for Lisa. He was a—well, you know what he looks like if you saw him starring in *Rotten Cop, A Bloody Mess,* and *Kill 'Em All.* Before getting into pictures in the late 60s, Henkel had been a mercenary soldier, fighting in Africa and Latin America.

Beau didn't accept much of Henkel's bio. He ran at least two items a week about him, the "so-called soldier boy." One would pick Henkel's alleged military record apart, the other would imply Henkel used a double for all the hazardous stunts in his films. Now it's the usual thing for a stuntman to do the dangerous stuff. Talc Henkel's publicity, however, made a point of stressing that he performed absolutely all the stunt work himself.

About this time I had to fly back to Chicago. Old Mazden had decided he wanted a soypig in our SoyHammy commercials. It was a very stressful trip, since I was originally scheduled to take Panky Zeffer back with me. But she'd punched the bartender at the airport cocktail lounge minutes before we were due to board our plane. I had to abandon her in Burbank, flying alone to Chicago several hours late.

Old Mazden began howling immediately on my arrival. He'd hired an actor to dress up in a pig suit and meet me at the airport in Chicago. The guy broke out in a prickly rash from hanging around so long inside the suit. Once we ironed out that problem, two full weeks were taken up in persuading Mazden the soypig idea was no good. Even after the actor brought a note from his allergist saying he couldn't wear the pig suit ever again, Mazden kept insisting the concept was basically sound.

I had just about convinced the old man that Panky was reforming when one of his minions brought in a copy of the *Hollywood Daily.* An item in Beau's column was circled with a thick, angry-looking red line. It dealt with our actress falling off a merry-go-round during a charity fundraiser at an Anaheim amusement park. Anybody can fall off a merry-go-round, but Panky managed thereafter to sock a fairly prominent bishop in the face.

I can still see myself sitting there in Mazden's immense office,

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which always smells strongly of real bacon, and feeling very chilled. Despite that I was able to notice the gossip item underneath the fatal one. Beau had written, ". . . Soldier boy Henkel's double ought to get extra dough. He not only did all the stunts in the just-lensed *Dum Dum Bullets,* he picked booze-buff Henkel out of three different gutters about town . . ."

When I returned home to Los Angeles I had to devote nearly all my time to auditioning new actresses to do the SoyHammy spots. This made Panky angry and she stormed up to the ad agency and conked me over the head with a wine bottle. In fairness to her I have to say it wasn't her wine bottle. It was one of the Busino Brothers new ones she snatched from a passing Account Supervisor who was carrying it to the Art Department.

For nearly a week I was in the hospital, with actresses and their agents popping in and out of my room. I shared the room with a mortician from Glendale, who came to fancy himself a casting expert after the second day. He became quite upset when I turned down the redhaired girl you've probably seen doing the Featherweight Toilet Tissue commercials and she tossed a couple of potted plants at me. Plants, I'd like to mention, given to me by the agents and actresses. All in all I didn't think about Beau Willet for quite a spell.

Then he phoned me after I'd been out three days and suggested we meet for lunch at the Salty Dog down near the beach in Santa Monica.

"You look awful," he said by way of greeting when I came strolling into the hotdog bistro. "Been in another slug match with your lady?"

"A mortician did most of this."

"You're not a bad guy," observed Beau, his eyes on the foot-long menu. "You've sold your soul to the forces of mammon, but you're still one of the few people in this crazy metropolis I can talk to honestly."

"I wasn't aware—"

"Trust me, I sense things about you. From being so much around Lisa."

"Talc Henkel must be about ready to practice therapy, too," I couldn't refrain from saying. "I hear he and Dr. Rubinchek are seeing a good—"

"That pseudo-soldier? He's nothing more than a barnacle on

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Beau Willet's love boat." He paused to frown over the menu. "I'm torn between Doggie Number 16 and Doggie Number 27."

"How's the miniature golf business?"

"Oh, I'm out of that. Didn't lose too much," said Beau. "Of course Lisa has it all figured out. Why I bought in, how come I lost my shirt, and so on and so forth. All off base. What do you think?"

"About what?"

"Doggie Number 16 as opposed to Doggie Number 27."

"Compromise and get one of each."

"Naw, then I'd end up with a doubledecker chin like yours. Do I want sauerkraut or sour cream on my dog? Oh, it's good Lisa isn't here to see me so undecided."

Eventually he settled on Number 22.

Halfway through it he pushed his plate aside. "Ever been in love?"

"Obviously. Since I'm married."

"There's one of the things I like about you, that unsinkable naivete," said Beau, cackling. "Love makes you do strange things."

"So I hear."

He poked at his hotdog with his plastic fork. "Love has made me do something I never thought I'd do," Beau continued. "Incredible."

I ate my Number 6 in silence.

"Yeah, something I never thought I'd do. I faked an item."

"Everybody does that."

"Beau Willet doesn't do that. Until now. Until that lowlife Talc Henkel came along." A very sad expression visited Beau's face. "Lots of the guff I've been writing about him isn't true. Oh, he was never a mercenary soldier, as far as I know. But that smug jerk really does do his own stunting. What a sorry situation for someone like me to fall into."

"What does Lisa say?"

"The usual claptrap. It's astounding how somebody so usually astute can be so far off on me. I feel terrible about compromising my ideals—besides which that bum can sue me."

"Is he going to?"

"He's never going to have Lisa as long as I'm around. Getting me tossed in the slammer might assure him an inside track."

"Here's a positive solution," I offered. "Why don't you marry

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her? Then—"

"Didn't I explain that to you? She won't marry me until—"

After a few seconds I asked, "Until what?"

"Some guff about my need to mature. How can you be immature and pull down a hundred thou a year? Sometimes she's—"

"Here's another solution. Forget about her, get a new girl."

"Are you nutsy? I *love* Dr. Lisa Rubinchek."

"We were very fond of the girl we had set to do the SoyHammy spots, too. When the time came, though, I was able to fire Panky without—"

"Boy, listen to yourself. The show-biz morality is taking you over. I'm talking about love, not salami."

"Ham," I corrected. "Although we'll probably be introducing a soysalami by next—"

"The answer," said Beau, "is to make Henkel look less attractive to Lisa."

"I saw him in *Rotten Cop* on TV the other night. He's a very striking man, tall and—"

"Tall isn't everything." Beau's head began to nod up and down. "I see it now, the column propaganda by itself isn't enough. I'm going to have to attack Talc Henkel from a new angle."

"What you really ought to do is—"

"Yeah, a different angle." He chuckled, clapped his hands. Elated now, he finished his hotdog and ordered a Number 15 malted to follow it.

They removed me from the SoyHammy account around this time, mostly because Mazden reverted to believing the soypig was the best solution to his sales problem. When one of our vice-presidents called on the old man and found him wearing the pig suit himself, he realized I'd be better off handling a brand-new account.

I took over a new product called FazBalm, a bar of soap containing 40 percent anti-chapping lotion. The idea was you washed with it right before heading out into the wind and snow. The client, who was based in Colorado, demanded we produce a series of commercials with sled dogs pulling a giant bar of FazBalm across a bleak stretch of Alaska. I tried to persuade him that lacked glamor.

While I was attempting this, in Colorado and Los Angeles, Beau commenced his campaign to ruin Talc Henkel in the eyes of his love. I saw Beau only once during this period, so some of the

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details of what he did I'm guessing at. He did admit he was responsible for the business with the cars and also to doping the horse. I'm certain, however, he was also responsible for all the accidents which befell the actor.

Despite my policy of staying out of things like this, I did make an attempt to talk to Dr. Lisa Rubinchek. I was anxious for more information about Beau's attitudes, and I suppose I had some notion of warning her. The closest I came was her private secretary who told me Dr. Rubinchek would be happy to give me 45 minutes of her time at the usual fee. I don't know, $150 for a single session seemed excessive and I let the matter drop. I decided if she was as perceptive as Beau claimed, she'd no doubt see all this for herself eventually.

Beau had decided to sabotage his rival. I don't know if initially he was considering murdering or even seriously injuring Henkel. Beau insisted to me he only wanted to make the actor appear inept and inefficient. With all Beau's studio connections and contacts it was simple enough for him to look at the shooting scripts of both *Dum Dum Bullets* and, later, *Right Between the Eyes.* He also had no trouble slipping into the Wheelan Studios after hours and tampering with the auto Henkel was scheduled to use the next day. I pointed out to him, when he confided in me about his activities after the fact, that Talc Henkel could have been badly hurt in the car stunt.

Ignoring me, Beau laughed his chuckly laugh. "It must have looked absolutely marvelous. The cars coming down the road, Talc Henkel in hot pursuit, and then the steering wheel comes off in his hand. Straight out of Abbott and Costello." Beau bounced on his chair, one of those canvas ones they have in the outdoors section of the Gourmet Seafood Shack in Malibu.

"You're lucky Talc was able to jump clear when—"

"*He's* lucky you mean."

"What about the horse in his new Western?"

"It fell asleep," said Beau with another chuckle.

"In the middle of a jump over a chasm?"

"Yeah, that really must have made him look lovely. Oh, the expression on that phony soldier boy's puss must have been a delight to behold. Going to have to catch a look at the footage for that day."

"The horse broke its neck."

"So? They got a lot of horses in Hollywood."

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"You better knock this off, Beau, before—"

"Can't yet. Not having its full effect."

"Meaning Lisa isn't impressed?"

"She's still dating that turkey," he acknowledged. "Why can't she see him for the fake he is, that imitation warrior? Sometimes Lisa is absolutely dense. I mean, if you've read her book, *You're Okey Dokey,* you know this is one very bright broad."

"What about Henkel? The way you keep heckling him in your column about his accidents, he's sure to tumble you're behind them."

"Not that nitwit. A pretty face he's got, and he's tall, but there's nothing in the old cabeza. Talc Henkel's never going to get wise to the source of his troubles. Sooner or later Lisa's going to see him for the fake clown he is. And she'll see me for—"

"For what?"

"For what I really am."

"Be careful," I cautioned.

We couldn't come up with an Alaska satisfactory to the client. The one we built at the ComFactors Studios didn't please him. I then made a deal to use the set left over from Val Klint's $12,000,000 remake of *Nanook of the North.* To me when those huskies came barking across that realistic snow, bravely pulling an enormous bar of soap, it made a heck of a convincing shot. The client wouldn't buy it. So I had to fly up to Alaska and use the real Alaska for our Alaska. Not half as good as what we had in Hollywood, as you'll probably agree if the commercial ever airs.

The whole experience consumed a month. When I returned home I found Beau Willet's obituary in with the other items my wife had clipped from the *L.A. Times* for me not to miss. She always does that when I'm away—sort of a family tradition. So there was the final notice about Beau in with an account of a show of billboard art at a Westwood gallery and a piece about sludge delaying the shooting of the pilot for the *Beachcomber* show my agency was thinking of sponsoring.

I sat in the sunlit breakfast room with the obit dangling in my hand for a long while. The morning was warm and there were flowers all around outside. I felt very cold.

Not that I really could have done anything to prevent what happened. Even if I hadn't been up in Alaska with those dogs. No, because Beau must have been planning what he was planning

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from the start of his personal campaign against Talc Henkel. He was going to kill his rival and make it look like an accident.

To do a perfect job he began, after the first few accidents didn't succeed in doing away with Henkel, to study. I learned this from a bookstore clerk in Beverly Hills. Beau bought all sorts of books on bombs, guerilla warfare, and weaponry. His final try, which he was certain would succeed, was inspired by Henkel himself.

Beau had escorted Lisa to the opening of *Nanook of the North*. At the cocktail party afterward up in Val Klint's Bel Air mansion they encountered Talc Henkel. Beau was, I'm fairly certain, hoping the lanky actor would get mad, lose his temper, and take a swing at him—behave the way most of the other people Beau wrote about did.

Not Talc. He came over, gave them both his familiar bony grin. "Been meaning to thank you for all the terrific publicity you been handing me, Beau. Keep it up. You're looking splendid this evening, Lisa."

"Thank you, Talc. Would you like to join us for a nightcap after this shindig?"

"Like to, Lisa, but can't. We're shooting the big mine cave-in scenes for *Right Between the Eyes* bright and early tomorrow morn. Since, despite what you read in the papers, I do my own stunts I'm going to have to get a good night's rest so I can go into that shaft bright-eyed and bushy-tailed."

Beau blinked. "Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, very early. Well, keep up the good work, Beau. Raincheck on that nightcap, Lisa love."

They weren't supposed to begin the cave-in sequence until next week. Beau had acquired all the extra explosives he'd need, but he wasn't figuring on setting up the mine accident for Henkel until Sunday night at the earliest.

"Lisa, hon, I have to rush back to the office. Just remembered a—"

"Beau, why mask your true feelings so? What do I always tell you? Isn't it the same message I've given the millions of readers of *You're Okey Dokey?* Yes, you mustn't let your feelings suffocate inside," said blonde willowy Lisa. "You're annoyed by Talc, by his obvious deep affection for me, and by my quite innocent invitation to him. Therefore you're burning to retaliate with a nasty dig at him in your column."

Sometimes it was almost more than Beau could take to hear all

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that guff coming out of that lovely mouth. He came near at such moments to understanding why the people he wrote about were always socking each other.

He didn't go to his Hollywood office when he dashed out of the Nanook party early. Instead he rushed, driving at the very edge of the speed limit, to his place in one of the canyons. There he gathered up the explosives that he'd purchased on the sly as soon as he read through the final script for *Right Between the Eyes*. No one, so far as I can determine, saw any of what happened next.

Beau drove out to the San Fernando Valley location they were using on the film. There was only an old watchman in a wooden shack to worry about, and he'd fallen asleep long before Beau arrived. He'd checked that out a few days earlier, the fact the old guy wasn't one to stay awake.

Leaving his car at a safe distance, Beau stole silently to the area being used as the old mine. There was a real shaft opening dug there, its mouth looking very dark in the cloudy midnight.

He approached the entrance to the shaft. A weathered sign had been hung over the entrance, reading *Lucky Susan Mine*. Picks and shovels, a dented canteen, and other tools were scattered over the gritty ground.

Carrying his explosives and equipment very carefully, Beau entered the dark shaft.

Three steps in he tripped the wire which had been strung across the opening. The explosives already there went off and that was the last of Beau Willet.

Talc Henkel wasn't as dense as Beau had imagined. He had fairly soon realized who was rigging his accidents. Motivated by a desire for revenge and, I imagine, wanting to get rid of his only serious rival for Lisa, Henkel set about arranging an accident of his own. This one to eliminate Beau.

Beau was wrong about Talc Henkel. All of the actor's biography was true. He had been a mercenary and had fought in several wars. One of his specialities was demolition.

"Q"

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THE CASE OF THE SHAGGY CAPS

by RUTH RENDELL

(continued from page 20)

Hood hadn't liked this directness. He flushed and looked affronted. He skirted round a frank answer. Well, yes, she drank. She was at pains to conceal her drinking. It had been going on more or less consistently since her first marriage broke up.

"In fact, she was an alcoholic," said Wexford.

"I suppose so."

"Your brother-in-law didn't know?"

"Good God, no. Axel would have killed her!" He realized what he had said. "Maybe that's why, maybe he found out."

"I don't think so, Mr. Hood. Now I imagine that in the first few months of her marriage she made an effort to give up drinking. She needed a good deal of support during this time, but she couldn't or wouldn't tell Mr. Kingman why she needed it. Her efforts failed, and slowly, because she couldn't manage without it, she began drinking again."

"She wasn't as bad as she used to be," Hood said with pathetic eagerness. "And only in the evenings. She told me she never had a drink before six, and then she'd have a few more, gulping them down on the quiet so Axel wouldn't know."

Burden said suddenly, "Had your sister been drinking that evening?"

"I expect so. She wouldn't have been able to face company, not even just Corinne and me, without a drink."

"Did anyone besides yourself know that your sister drank?"

"My mother did. My mother and I had a sort of pact to keep it dark from everyone so that Axel wouldn't find out." He hesitated, then said rather defiantly, "I did tell Corinne. She's a wonderful person, she's very clever. I was worried about it and I didn't know what I ought to do. She promised she wouldn't tell Axel."

"I see." Wexford had his own reasons for thinking that hadn't happened. Deep in thought, he got up and walked to the other end of the room where he stood gazing out of the window. Burden's

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continuing questions, Hood's answers, reached him only as a confused murmur of voices. Then he heard Burden say more loudly, "That's all for now, Mr. Hood, unless the Chief Inspector has anything more to ask you."

"No, no," said Wexford abstractedly, and when Hood had somewhat truculently departed, "Time for lunch. It's past two. Personally I shall avoid any dishes containing fungi, even *psalliota campestris*."

After Burden had looked that one up and identified it as the Common Mushroom, they lunched and then made a round of such wineshops in Kingsmarkham as were open at that hour. At the Wine Basket they drew a blank, but the assistant in the Vineyard told them that a woman answering Hannah Kingman's description had been a regular customer, and that on the previous Wednesday, the day before her death, she had called in and bought a bottle of Courvoisier Cognac.

"There was no liquor of any kind in Kingman's flat," said Burden. "Might have been an empty bottle in the rubbish, I suppose." He made a rueful face. "We didn't look, didn't think we had any reason to. But she couldn't have drunk a whole bottleful on the Wednesday, could she?"

"Why are you so interested in this drinking business, Mike? You don't seriously see it as a motive for murder, do you? That Kingman killed her because he'd found out, or been told, that she was a secret drinker?"

"It was a means, not a motive," said Burden. "I know how it was done. I know how Kingman tried to kill her that first time." He grinned. "Makes a change for me to find the answer before you, doesn't it? I'm going to follow in your footsteps and make a mystery of it for the time being, if you don't mind. With your permission we'll go back to the station, pick up those Shaggy Caps, and conduct a little experiment."

Michael Burden lived in a neat bungalow in Tabard Road, Kingsmarkham. He had lived there with his wife until her untimely and tragic death and continued to live there still with his sixteen-year-old daughter, his son being away at a university. But that evening Pat Burden was out with her boy friend, and there was a note left for her father on the refrigerator. *Dad, I ate the cold beef from yesterday. Can you open a tin for yourself? Back by eleven. Love, P.*

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"I'm glad she hasn't cooked anything," said Burden with what Wexford called his sloppy look, the expression that came over his face whenever he thought his children might be inconvenienced or made to lift a finger on his account. "I shouldn't be able to eat it, and I'd hate her to take it as criticism."

Wexford made the sound that used to be written "Pshaw!" "You've got sensible kids and you treat them like paranoiacs. While you're deciding just how much I'm to be told about this experiment of yours, d'you mind if I phone my wife?"

"Be my guest."

It was nearly six. Wexford came back to find Burden peeling carrots and onions. The four specimens of *coprinus comatus,* beginning now to look a little wizened, lay on a chopping board. On the stove a saucepanful of bone stock was heating up.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Making Shaggy Cap stew. My theory is that the stew is harmless when eaten by non-drinkers, and toxic, or toxic to some extent, when taken by those with alcohol in the stomach. How about that? In a minute, when this lot's cooking, I'm going to take a moderate quantity of alcohol, then I'm going to eat the stew. Now say I'm a damned fool if you like."

Wexford shrugged. He grinned. "I'm overcome by so much courage and selfless devotion to the duty you owe the taxpayers. But wait a minute. Are you sure only Hannah had been drinking that night? We know Kingman hadn't. What about those other two?"

"I asked Hood that while you were off in your daydream. He called for Corinne Last at six, at her request. They picked some apples for his mother, then she made him coffee. He did suggest they call in at a pub for a drink on their way to the Kingmans, but apparently she took so long getting ready that they didn't have time."

"Okay. Go ahead then. But wouldn't it be easier to call in an expert? There must be such people. Very likely someone holds a chair of fungology at the University of the South."

"Very likely. We can do that after I've tried it. I want to know for sure *now*. Are you willing too?"

"Certainly not. I'm not your guest to that extent. Since I've told my wife I won't be home for dinner, I'll take it as a kindness if you'll make me some innocent scrambled eggs."

He followed Burden into the living room where the Inspector opened a door in the sideboard. "What'll you drink?"

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"White wine, if you've got any, or vermouth if you haven't. You know how abstemious I have to be."

Burden poured vermouth and soda. "Ice?"

"No, thanks. What are you going to have? Brandy? That was Hannah Kingman's favorite, apparently."

"Haven't got any," said Burden. "It'll have to be whiskey. I think we can reckon she had two double brandies before that meal, don't you? I'm not so brave I want to be as ill as she was." He caught Wexford's eye. "You don't think some people could be more sensitive to it than others, do you?"

"Bound to be," said Wexford breezily. "Cheers!"

Burden sipped his heavily watered whiskey, then tossed it down. "I'll just have a look at my stew. You sit down. Put the television on."

Wexford obeyed him. The big colored picture was of a wood in autumn, pale blue sky, golden beech leaves. Then the camera closed in on a cluster of red-and-white spotted Fly Agaric. Chuckling, Wexford turned it off as Burden put his head round the door.

"I think it's more or less ready."

"Better have another whiskey."

"I suppose I had." Burden came in and refilled his glass. "That ought to do it."

"What about my eggs?"

"Oh, God, I forgot. I'm not much of a cook, you know. Don't know how women manage to get a whole lot of different things brewing and make them synchronize."

"It is a mystery, isn't it? I'll get myself some bread and cheese, if I may."

The brownish mixture was in a soup bowl. In the gravy floated four Shaggy Caps, cut lengthwise. Burden finished his whiskey at a gulp.

"What was it the Christians in the arena used to say to the Roman Emperor before they went to the lions?"

"*Morituri, te salutamus*," said Wexford. " 'We who are about to die salute thee.' "

"Well. . ." Burden made an effort with the Latin he had culled from his son's homework. "*Moriturus, te saluto.* Would that be right?"

"I daresay. You won't die, though."

Burden made no answer. He picked up his spoon and began to eat. "Can I have some more soda?" said Wexford.

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There are perhaps few stabs harder to bear than derision directed at one's heroism. Burden gave him a sour look. "Help yourself. I'm busy."

The Chief Inspector did so. "What's it like?" he said.

"All right. It's quite nice, like mushrooms."

Doggedly he ate. He didn't once gag on it. He finished the lot and wiped the bowl round with a piece of bread. Then he sat up, holding himself rather tensely.

"May as well have your telly on now," said Wexford. "Pass the time." He switched it on again. No Fly Agaric this time, but a dog fox moving across a meadow with Vivaldi playing. "How d'you feel?"

"Fine," said Burden gloomily.

"Cheer up. It may not last."

But it did. After fifteen minutes had passed, Burden still felt perfectly well. He looked bewildered. "I was so damned positive. I *knew* I was going to be retching and vomiting by now. I didn't put the car away because I was certain you'd have to run me down to the hospital."

Wexford only raised his eyebrows.

"You were pretty casual about it, I must say. Didn't say a word to stop me, did you? Didn't it occur to you it might have been a bit awkward for you if anything had happened to me?"

"I knew it wouldn't. I said to get a fungologist." And then Wexford, faced by Burden's aggrieved stare, burst out laughing. "Dear old Mike, you'll have to forgive me. But you know me, d'you honestly think I'd have let you risk your life eating that stuff? I knew you were safe."

"May one ask how?"

"One may. And you'd have known too if you'd bothered to take a proper look at that book of Corinne Last's. Under the recipe for Shaggy Cap stew it said, 'For drinkables, see page 171.' Well, I looked at page 171, and there Miss Last gave a recipe for cowslip wine and another for sloe gin, both highly intoxicating drinks. Would she have recommended a wine and a spirit to drink with those fungi if there'd been the slightest risk? Not if she wanted to sell her book, she wouldn't. Not unless she was risking hundreds of furious letters and expensive lawsuits from her readers."

Burden had flushed a little. Then he too began to roar with laughter.

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After a little while Burden made coffee.

"A little logical thinking would be in order, I fancy," said Wexford. "You said this morning that we were not so much seeking to prove murder as attempted murder. Axel Kingman could have pushed her off that balcony, but no one saw her fall and no one heard him or anyone else go up to that flat during the afternoon. If, however, an attempt was made to murder her two weeks before, the presumption that she was eventually murdered is enormously strengthened."

Burden said impatiently, "We've been through all that. We know that."

"Wait a minute. The attempt failed. Now just how seriously ill was she? According to Kingman and Hood, she had severe stomach pains and she vomited. By midnight she was peacefully sleeping and by the following day she was all right."

"I don't see where all this is getting us."

"To a point which is very important and which may be the crux of the whole case. You say that Axel Kingman attempted to murder her. In order to do so he must have made very elaborate plans—the arranging of the meal, the inviting of two witnesses, the insuring that his wife tasted the stew earlier in the day, and preparing for some very nifty sleight of hand at the time the meal was served. Isn't it odd that the actual method used should so signally have failed? That Hannah's *life* never seems to have been in danger? And what if the method had succeeded? At post-mortem some noxious agent would have been found in her body, or the effects of such. How could he have hoped to get away with that since, as we know, neither of his witnesses actually watched him serve Hannah and one of them was even out of the room?

"So what I am postulating is that no one attempted to murder her, but someone *attempted* to make her ill so that, taken in conjunction with the sinister reputation of non-mushroom fungi and Hood's admitted suspicion of them, taken in conjunction with the known unhappiness of the marriage, *it would look as if there had been a murder attempt.*"

Burden stared at him. "Kingman would never have done that. He would either have wanted his attempt to succeed or not to have looked like an attempt at all."

"Exactly. And where does that get us?"

Instead of answering him Burden said on a note of triumph, his humiliation still rankling, "You're wrong about one thing. She

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was seriously ill, she didn't just have nausea and vomiting. Kingman and Hood may not have mentioned it, but Corinne Last said she had double vision and black spots before her eyes and . . ." His voice faltered. "My God, you mean—?"

Wexford nodded. "Corinne Last *only* of the three says she had those symptoms. Only Corinne Last is in a position to say, because she lived with him, if Kingman was in the habit of rinsing plates as soon as he removed them from the table. What does she say? That she doesn't know. Isn't that rather odd? Isn't it rather odd too that she chose that precise moment to leave the table and go out into the hall for her handbag?

"She knew that Hannah drank because Hood had told her so. On the evening that meal was eaten, you say Hood called for her at her own request. Why? She has her own car, and I don't for a moment believe a woman like her would feel anything much but contempt for Hood."

"She told him there was something wrong with her car."

"I see. She asked him to come at six, although they were not due at the Kingmans till eight. She gave him *coffee*. A funny thing to drink at that hour, wasn't it, and before a meal? So what happens when he suggests calling in at a pub on the way? She doesn't say no or say it isn't a good idea to drink and drive. She takes so long getting ready that they don't have time.

"She didn't want Hood to drink any alcohol, Mike, and she was determined to prevent it. She, of course, would take no alcohol and she knew Kingman never drank. But she also knew Hannah's habit of having her first drink of the day at about six.

"Now look at her motive, far stronger than Kingman's. She strikes me as a violent, passionate, and determined woman. Hannah had taken Kingman away from her. Kingman had rejected her. Why not revenge herself on both of them by killing Hannah and seeing to it that Kingman was convicted of the crime? If she simply killed Hannah, she had no way of insuring that Kingman would come under suspicion. But if she made it look as if he had previously attempted her life, the case against him would become very strong indeed.

"Where was she last Thursday afternoon? She could just as easily have gone up those stairs as Kingman could. Hannah would have admitted her to the flat. If she, known to be interested in gardening, had suggested that Hannah take her onto that balcony and show her the pot herbs, Hannah would willingly have done

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so. And then we have the mystery of the missing brandy bottle with some of its contents surely remaining. If Kingman had killed her, he would have left that there as it would greatly have strengthened the case for suicide. Imagine how he might have used it. 'Heavy drinking made my wife ill that night. She knew I had lost respect for her because of her drinking. She killed herself because her mind was unbalanced by drink.'

"Corinne Last took that bottle away because she didn't want it known that Hannah drank, and she was banking on Hood's keeping it dark from us just as he had kept it from so many people in the past. And she didn't want it known because the fake murder attempt that *she* staged depended on her victim having alcohol present in her body."

Burden sighed, poured the last dregs of coffee into Wexford's cup. "But we tried that out," he said. "Or I tried it out, and it doesn't work. You knew it wouldn't work from her book. True, she brought the Shaggy Caps from her own garden, but she couldn't have mixed up poisonous fungi with them because Axel Kingman would have realized at once. Or if he hadn't, they'd all have been ill, alcohol or no alcohol. She was never alone with Hannah before the meal, and while the stew was served she was out of the room."

"I know. But we'll see her in the morning and ask her a few sharp questions. I'm going home now, Mike. It's been a long day."

"Shall I run you home?"

"I'll walk," said Wexford. "Don't forget to put your car away, will you? You won't be making any emergency trips to hospital tonight."

With a shamefaced grin Burden saw him out.

They were unable to puncture her self-possession. The languorous Klimt face was carefully painted this morning, and she was dressed as befitted the violinist or the actress or the author. She had been forewarned of their coming, and the gardener image had been laid aside. Her long smooth hands looked as if they had never touched the earth or pulled up a weed.

Where had she been on the afternoon of Hannah Kingman's death? Her thick shapely eyebrows went up. At home, indoors, painting. Alone?

"Painters don't work with an audience," she said rather insolently, and she leaned back, dropping her eyelids in that way of

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hers. She lit a cigarette and flicked her fingers at Burden for an ashtray as if he were a waiter.

Wexford said, "On Saturday, October 29th, Miss Last, I believe you had something wrong with your car?"

She nodded lazily.

In asking what was wrong with it, he thought he might catch her. He didn't.

"The glass in the offside front headlight was broken while the car was parked," she said, and although he thought how easily she could have broken that glass herself, he could hardly say so. In the same smooth voice she added, "Would you like to see the bill I had from the garage for repairing it?"

"That won't be necessary." She wouldn't have offered to show it to him if she hadn't possessed it, he thought. "You asked Mr. Hood to call for you here at six, I understand."

"Yes. He's not my idea of the best company in the world, but I'd promised him some apples for his mother and we had to pick them before it got dark."

"You gave him coffee but had no alcohol. You had no drinks on the way to Mr. and Mrs. Kingman's flat. Weren't you a little disconcerted at the idea of going out to dinner at a place where there wouldn't even be a glass of wine?"

"I was used to Mr. Kingman's ways." But not so used, thought Wexford, that you can tell me whether it was normal or abnormal for him to have rinsed those plates. Her mouth curled a little, betraying her a little. "It didn't bother me. I'm not a slave to liquor."

"I should like to return to these—er, Shaggy Caps. You picked them from here on October 28th and took them to Mr. Kingman that evening. I think you said that?"

"I did. I picked them from this garden."

She enunciated the words precisely, her eyes wide-open and gazing sincerely at him. The words, or perhaps her unusual straightforwardness, stirred in him the glimmer of an idea. But if she had said nothing more, that idea might have died as quickly as it had been born.

"If you want to have them analyzed or examined or whatever, you're getting a bit late. Their season's practically over." She looked at Burden and gave him a gracious smile. "But you took the last of them yesterday, didn't you? So that's all right."

Wexford, of course, said nothing about Burden's experiment.

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"We'll have a look in your garden, if you don't mind."

She didn't seem to mind, but she had been wrong. Most of the fungi had grown into black-gilled pagodas in the 24 hours that had elapsed. Two new ones, however, had thrust their white oval caps up through the wet grass. Wexford picked them, and still she didn't seem to mind. Why, then, had she seemed to want their season to be over? He thanked her and she went back into the cottage. The door closed. Wexford and Burden went out into the road.

The fungus season was far from over. From the abundant array on the roadside it looked as if the season would last weeks longer. Shaggy Caps were everywhere, some of them smaller and grayer than the clump that grew out of Corinne Last's well-fed lawn; green and purple Agarics, horn-shaped toadstools, and tiny mushrooms growing in fairy rings.

"She doesn't exactly mind us having them analyzed," Wexford said thoughtfully, "but it seems she'd prefer the analysis to be done on the ones you picked yesterday than on those I picked today. Can that be so or am I just imagining it?"

"If you're imagining it, I'm imagining it too. But it's no good, that line of reasoning. We know they're not potentiated—or whatever the word is—by alcohol."

"I shall pick some more all the same," said Wexford. "Haven't got a paper bag, have you?"

"I've got a clean handkerchief. Will that do?"

"Have to," said Wexford who never had a clean one. He picked a dozen more young Shaggy Caps, big and small, white and gray, immature and fully grown. They got back into the car and Wexford told the driver to stop at the Public Library. He went in and emerged a few minutes later with three books under his arm.

"When we get back," he said to Burden, "I want you to get on to the university and see what they can offer us in the way of an expert in fungology."

He closeted himself in his office with the three books and a pot of coffee. When it was nearly lunchtime, Burden knocked on the door.

"Come in," said Wexford. "How did you get on?"

"They don't have a fungologist. But there's a man on the faculty who's a toxicologist and who's just published one of those popular science books. This one's about poisoning by wild plants and fungi."

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Wexford grinned. "What's it called? *Killing for Nothing*? He sounds as if he'd do fine."

"I said we'd see him at six. Let's hope something will come of it."

"No doubt it will." Wexford slammed shut the thickest of his books. "We need confirmation," he said, "but I've found the answer."

"For God's sake! Why didn't you say?"

"You didn't ask. Sit down." Wexford motioned him to the chair on the other side of the desk. "I said you'd done your homework, Mike, and so you had, only your textbook wasn't quite comprehensive enough. It's got a section on edible fungi and a section on poisonous fungi—*but nothing in between.* What I mean by that is, there's nothing in your book about fungi which aren't wholesome yet which don't cause death or intense suffering. There's nothing about the kind which can make a person ill under certain circumstances."

"But we know they ate Shaggy Caps," Burden protested. "And if by 'circumstances' you mean the intake of alcohol, we know Shaggy Caps aren't affected by alcohol."

"Mike," said Wexford quietly, "*do* we know they ate Shaggy Caps?" He spread out on the desk the haul he had made from the roadside and from Corinne Last's garden. "Look closely at these, will you?"

Quite bewildered now, Burden looked at and fingered the dozen or so specimens of fungi. "What am I to look *for*?"

"Differences," said Wexford laconically.

"Some of them are smaller than the others, and the smaller ones are grayish. Is that what you mean? But, look here, think of the differences between mushrooms. You get big flat ones and small button ones and—"

"Nevertheless, in this case it is that small difference that makes all the difference." Wexford sorted the fungi into two groups. "All the small grayer ones," he said, "came from the roadside. Some of the larger whiter ones came from Corinne Last's garden and some from the roadside."

He picked up between forefinger and thumb a specimen of the former. "This is not a Shaggy Cap, it is an Ink Cap. Now listen." The thick book fell open where he had placed a marker. Slowly and clearly he read: "*The Ink Cap,* coprinus atramentarius, *is not to be confused with the Shaggy Cap,* coprinus comatus. *It is small-*

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er and grayer in color, but otherwise the resemblance between them is strong. While coprinus atramentarius *is usually harmless when cooked, it contains, however, a chemical similar to the active principle in Antabuse, a drug used in the treatment of alcoholics, and if eaten in conjunction with alcohol will cause nausea and vomiting.*"

"We'll never prove it," Burden gasped.

"I don't know about that," said Wexford. "We can begin by concentrating on the *one lie* we know Corinne Last told when she said she picked the fungi she gave Axel Kingman from *her own garden*."

NEXT MONTH...

14 ***NEW*** stories—including

STANLEY ELLIN (about a family circle)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Dr. Sam Hawthorne)

JACK RITCHIE (about a hung jury)

R. BRETNOR (about an accident epidemic)

PETE HAMILL (about a soldier's song)

DAVID ELY (about the looting of a tomb)

and an Honor Roll reprint by JOHN DICKSON CARR

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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS WALSH

The story of Padre, a remittance man—$50 apiece the first of every month from his four successful brothers—Padre, the drunken, profligate, defrocked priest, who spent from seven till closing time, every night, on a stool at the end of Harrington's bar—and one of the most compassionate and moving stories of an alcoholic you have ever read . . .

CHANCE AFTER CHANCE

by THOMAS WALSH

Padre, everybody in Harrington's called him. Year after year he dropped in from his furnished room about seven at night, then drank steadily until three in the morning, closing time; and one Christmas Eve, very drunk, he curled both arms around his shot glass, put his head down, and began chanting some kind of crazy gibberish. Nobody in Harrington's knew what it was—but maybe, Harrington himself thought later on, maybe it was Latin. Because little by little, from remarks he let drop about his earlier life, it became rumored that he had once been a Roman Catholic priest in a small New England town somewhere near Boston.

He was perhaps in his fifties and in youth must have been a lusty and physically powerful man. Now, however, the whiskey had almost finished him. His hands trembled; his face was markedly lined, weary and sunken; his shabby alcoholic's jauntiness had a forced ring to it; and he was almost never without a stubble of dirty gray beard on his cheeks.

One night Jack Delgardo on the next stool inquired idly as to why they had kicked him out of the church. Was it the whiskey, Jack wanted to know, or was it women? Did he mean to say they never even gave him a second chance?

"Well, a chance," Padre admitted, always a bit genially boastful in man-of-the-world conversation. "They found out about a certain

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French girl over in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and because of her and the booze they told me I'd have to go down to a penitential monastery in Georgia for two years. But bare feet and long hours of prayerful communion with the Lord God would be the only ticket for me in that place, not to mention the dirtiest sort of physical labor day after day. They had no conception at all, however, about the kind of man they were dealing with. So naturally, when I told the monsignor straight out where to go, since I discovered that I had lost the faith by that time, there was no more point in discussing the matter. A long time past, Jack—twenty-odd years."

But Jack Delgardo was not much interested in the Lord God. Besides which, he had just seen his new girl bob in, very dainty and elegant, through Harrington's front door.

"Yeah," he said, rising briskly. "Can't blame you a bit, Padre, for getting the hell out. See you around, huh?"

"Very probably," Padre said, blessing him with humorously overdone solemnity for the free drink. "Always here, Jack. Could you spare me a dollar or two until the first of the month?"

Because the first of the month was when his four checks arrived. In Harrington's he never mentioned that part of his life, but he came from a large and very prosperous family of Boston Irish—Robert the surgeon, Michael the chemist, Edward the engineer, and Kevin Patrick the businessman; and three married sisters and their families who had all settled down years ago in one or another of the more well-to-do Boston suburbs.

But Padre had eventually found himself unable to endure his family any more than he had been able to endure his monsignor. He never failed to detect a slight but telltale flush of shame and apology when they had to introduce him to some friend who dropped by, and he could all too easily imagine the sly knowledge of him that would be whispered from mouth to mouth later on—the weakling of the family, the black sheep, the spoiled youngest of them, and now the drunken, profligate, defrocked priest.

Although having been the spoiled youngest, Padre occasionally thought, might have been the beginning of all his troubles. Like Robert he might well have been the surgeon, or like Michael the chemist, but as little Joey, always too much loved, always dearest and closest of anyone to the mother, he seemed never once to have had his own life in his hands. As far back as he could remember

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anything, he could remember Mama and him in a church pew, with sunlight streaming in over them through a stained-glass window, her face lifted up to the high dim altar before them, her lips moving silently, and the rosary beads slipping one by one through her fingers.

Only three or four years old then, Padre had been young enough to believe anything he was told; young enough, in fact, to have believed everything. Only in seminary days had come his first questioning, his first resentment, his first rebellion. So he had written a long letter to his favorite uncle, Uncle Jack, and announced dramatically that he was unable to take the life any more. So if Uncle Jack could not get Mama to see some sense, he had made up his mind to run away, or even to kill himself.

But in the end he had done neither. He had gone on, and he could also remember, if he ever wanted to, a winter night soon afterward in the kitchen at home, with Uncle Jack and his mother shouting angrily at each other from opposite sides of the table.

"Don't try to make the boy do what he has no inclination at all for," Uncle Jack had cried out at her. "Damn it to hell, Maggie, can't you understand there's nothing half so contemptible in this world as a bad priest? Where in God's name are your brains? It's his life, don't you see? It's not yours. Then let him do what he wants with it, or you'll have to answer for that yourself. It's just the pride you'd feel at having a son in the church—that's why you're bound and determined on it! Why, you're forcing him to—"

Leaning forward shakily, his mother had rested both hands on the table in front of her.

"He'll do what I say!" she had cried back. "He'll have the only true happiness there is in this world. He'll have the collar, I tell you! And you daring to come here tonight and lead him on like this when you never once had the faith that I do, and you never will! What were you all your days but a shame and disgrace to yourself and to the Holy Roman Catholic Church? I know what he wants and what he needs, and better than you. I've prayed to the Blessed Lady every night of my life for it—and she'll answer me! And you'll change that, will you, with your mad carrying on here tonight, and your cursing and swearing at us! Then I take my vow on the thing here and now. From this day on I swear to Almighty God that you and yours will never again enter this house, as I swear to Almighty God that I and mine will never again

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enter yours! Is that the answer you want? Then there it is. Never again!"

But after that had come the sudden horrible twist of her whole face to one side and her clumsy lurch forward halfway across the table. And after that, Padre could also remember, there had been the family doctor hurriedly summoned, and old Father O'Mara, and up in her bedroom a few minutes after, all the family down on their knees, with Bonnie and Eileen and Agnes all crying, and Father O'Mara leading them on solemnly and gravely in the Litany for the Dying. But Padre had been closest of all to her, as he knew from the day of his birth he had always been, and holding her hand. So . . .

So. He had gone on. He had done what he had promised her in that moment, if without words. He had got the collar at last. But now, on the first of every month, what he got were the $50 checks mailed in, one apiece, from the surgeon and the chemist and the engineer and the businessman. To earn them, tacitly understood, he had only to keep himself well away from the city of Boston for as long as he lived. So Harrington's, as the finale of all; so his regular stool at the end of the bar, nearest the rest rooms; so Padre, now hardly more than a shaky and alcoholic shadow of his former self, at the age of not quite 53 years old.

There, year after year, he troubled no one and bothered no one, making no friends and no enemies. So he was rather surprised when he was invited up to Jack Delgardo's apartment on Lexington Avenue one January night to meet two of Jack's friends, with a promise that the whiskey would be free and liberally provided for him. And it was. They all had a lot to drink, one after another—a lot even for Padre; and then in half an hour or so, surprisingly enough, it appeared that the conversation had turned to theology.

"But at least you have to believe in God," Jack argued, refilling the glass for him. "You can't kid me, Padre—because a guy has to believe in something, that's all, no matter what he says. And I can still remember what they taught me in parochial school. Once a priest always a priest, the way I got it."

"Quite true," Padre had to agree, smacking his lips over the fine bourbon. "Although I believe the Biblical terminology is a priest forever, according to the order of the high priest Melchizedek."

"Yesh, I guess," Eddie Roberts grinned—Steady Eddie, as Jack

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often referred to him. "Only how do you mean high, Padre? The way you get every night in the week down at Harrington's?"

At that they all laughed, including Padre, although the third man, Pete, did not permit the laugh to change his expression in any way. He had said little so far. He appeared to be studying Padre silently and intently, though not openly, dropping his eyes down to the cigarette in his hand every time Padre happened to glance at him.

"No, not quite like me," Padre said, very jovial about it. "In seminary we used to paraphrase a poem about him, or at least I did. 'Melchizedek, he praised the Lord and gave some wine to Abraham; but who can tell what else he did is smarter far than what I am.' "

"Oh, sometimes you seem smart enough," Steady Eddie put in. "Almost smart enough to know the right score, Padre. I wonder, are you?"

"Classical education," Padre assured him. "Only the best, Eddie, Latin, Greek, and Advanced Theology."

"Yeah, but I thought the theology never took," Jack said, exchanging a quick glance with Pete. "That's what you're always claiming around at Harrington's, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," Padre had to agree once more. "At least these days. Years ago it just happened to strike me all of a sudden that the Lord God Almighty, granting that He exists at all, isn't what most of us are inclined to believe about Him. Look at His record for yourself. Who else, one by one, has killed off every life that He ever created?"

"Yeah, but Sister Mary Cecilia," Jack objected, "used to tell us that no human being ever died, actually. They were transported."

"No, no," Padre corrected grandly. "Transformed, Jack. Into a higher and more superior being, into the spirit; or else, conversely, down into eternal and everlasting hell. And very useful teaching too, let me tell you. Nothing like it for keeping in line everyone who still believes."

"Only you don't believe it any more?" Pete asked softly.

Padre finished his drink, again smacking his lips over it with great relish. He was very cunning in defending himself at these moments. He'd had much practise.

"I believe," he said, indicating the glass to them, "in what a man sees, hears, tastes, touches, and feels. That's what I believe, gentlemen, and all I believe. Is your bourbon running out, Jack?"

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"Yeah, sure," Steady Eddie grinned. "But of course lots of guys talk real big with a few drinks in them. Sometimes you never know whether to believe them or not, Padre."

"So you don't believe in nothing," Pete said, while Jack hurriedly refilled Padre's glass. "Nothing at all. How about money, though? You believe in that?"

"Oh, most emphatically. And in God too. Or at least," Padre amended, trying his new drink, "at least God in the bottle. Which of course means God in the wallet too."

"Yeah, but old habits," Pete said, even more softly. "Hard to break, Padre. Let's suppose somebody ast you to hear a guy's confession, say—and for maybe five or ten thousand dollars? Your specialty too. Right up your alley. Only it wouldn't bother you even one bit?"

"Shrive the penitent," Padre beamed, knowing that he was somewhat overdoing it, as always in discussions of this kind, but unable to restrain himself. Why? He did not know. He did not, as a matter of fact, want to know. It simply had to be done, that was all. Someone had to know the kind of a man He was dealing with. "Solace the afflicted and comfort the dying. I've heard many a confession in my day, and for nothing at all. Very juicy listening too, some of them. You wouldn't believe the things that—"

Pete and Jack exchanged quick glances. Steady Eddie inched forward a bit.

"And then tell us," he whispered, "tell us what the guy said to you afterwards?"

Padre, hand up with the refilled glass, felt an altogether absurd catch of the heart. He had broken many vows in his time, but there was one he had not. He looked over at Eddie, as if a bit startled, then up at Jack, then around at Pete. But this was not fair, something whispered in him. This was active and deliberate malevolence. All his life he had been tried and tried, and beyond his strength; tested and tested; but now at last to betray the only thing he had never betrayed . . .

Yet he managed to nod calmly. There had to be considered, after all, the kind of man that he was, and what five or ten thousand dollars would mean to him. Could he admit now that he had lied and lied even to himself all these years, and lied to everyone else too? Never! It was not to be thought of for one instant.

"I see," he murmured. "And tell you afterwards. So that's the condition?"

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"That's the condition," Pete said. "You still got a priest's shirt and a Roman collar, Padre?"

"Here or there," Padre said, still smiling brightly at them, which was very necessary now; nothing but the bold face for it. "Only it's been a very long time, of course. As the old song has it, there's been a few changes made. So I don't know that I could quite—"

Jack Delgardo rubbed a savage hand over his mouth. Steady Eddie replaced his grin with a cold ominous stare. But Pete proved much more acute than either of them. He understood at once why the protest had been made by Padre—not out of strength, but from sudden shrinking weakness; the hidden and unadmitted desire, probably, to be persuaded now even against himself.

"Easiest thing in the world," Pete remarked quietly. "Guy you know, too—so no question about you being a priest, Padre. All you'd have to say is that you've gone back to the church and he'd believe it. Remember Big Lefty Carmichael?"

And Padre did, four or five years ago from Harrington's, but not clearly. He was trying to get the name straight in his head when Jack Delgardo leaned forward to him.

"Well, they let him out," Jack whispered, resting his right hand on Padre's arm, then shaking it, as if to give the most perfect assurance of what he said. "He got sick up in Dannemora Prison, Padre, and now he's dying in a cheap little furnished room over on Ninth Avenue. They can't do a damned thing for him any more now. They can't even operate. He's just sick as hell and ready to holler cop, see? A friend of his told us. He said that Lefty asked him to bring a priest tomorrow night. So where's any problem?"

That time Padre decided only to sip from his glass. He had begun to feel all drunkenly confused.

"Because what happened," Pete drawled, apparently observing that Padre could not quite place the name, "is that Lefty and two other guys got away with a potful of money three years ago—only they piled up into a trailer truck on Second Avenue, and no one but Lefty got out alive.

"Then the cops grabbed him that night, soon as they identified the two dead guys he always worked with. Grabbed him, Padre—but not the bank money. Well, he couldn't have spent it, of course. No time. And he wouldn't have given it to anyone to hold for him, because he wasn't that stupid. He must have stashed it away somewhere real cute, and wherever he put it, it's

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still there. They only let him out of Dannemora yesterday morning and he ain't left the house on Ninth Avenue since he got there. He couldn't have. We've been watching it. We'd have seen.

"Okay. So now he wants somebody like you, old Lefty does. No more of the old zip in him, Padre. So if we have the friend tell him about you rejoining the church and all, he's gonna believe it. You're the kind of a priest he wouldn't mind telling his confession to, you know what I mean? You're just like him, the way he'll look at it. You're both losers. Then when he confesses about the bank holdup, all you have to do is tell him he's got to make restitution for what he stole. That's what you'd do, anyway, isn't it? Only this time, of course, soon as he tells you where the money is hid—"

Padre picked up his drink from the coffee table and this time he emptied it. His mind still worked slowly, which irritated him. He could not understand why. So he took good care to conceal whatever he felt, and to smile back at Pete even more arrogantly than before. He reached over to the bourbon bottle with his right hand, lifted it, and solemnly blessed the assembly.

"*Absolvo te,*" he announced then, and in a tone that successfully gave just the right touch of derisive priestly unction to what he said. " 'Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.' If it's as simple as that, gentlemen, then I think we're just about agreed on the matter. Let's say somewhere about nine o'clock tomorrow night, then. What's the address?"

Pete was behind the steering wheel, Eddie beside him. Jack Delgardo was crouched forward in the middle of the back seat. It was 9:30 the next night and they were all watching the entrance to a tenement house directly opposite.

About fifteen minutes later Padre came out of the house. He was now shaved cleanly; he wore the black shirt and the Roman collar; and Steady Eddie at once reached back to open the rear door.

"Hey, Padre," he called guardedly. "Over here. We decided to wait for you."

It was a cold January night, with misty rain in the air, but Padre removed his hat a bit wearily in the vestibule doorway. They could see his gray hair then, and the thinly drawn pale face under it—the alcoholic's face. He glanced about, right and left, but did not move until Pete impatiently tapped on the car horn.

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Even then, when Jack Delgardo had made room on the back seat, there was a kind of funny look on his face, Steady Eddie thought—a look, for a couple of long seconds, just like he had never seen them before and did not know who they were.

"So how did it go?" Jack Delgardo whispered. "Come on and tell us, Padre. He make his confession to you?"

But for another moment or so Padre only fingered the black hat on his knees, lightly and carefully.

"Yes," he said then. "Yes, he did. He made his confession."

"Then open up," Steady Eddie urged. "What did he tell you? Where's the money, Padre?"

"What?" Padre said. He appeared to be thinking of other matters; like in some damn fog, Jack thought furiously. He did not answer the question. All he did was to keep smoothing the black hat time after time while looking down at it, as if he had never seen that before either. "But first," he added, "I decided that I'd better talk to him a little—to get him into the right mood for the thing. And I had to think up the words to do that, of course—only pretty soon they seemed to be coming out of me all by themselves. Father, he kept calling me—" and he had to laugh here, with a kind of shakily nervous unsteadiness. "It's almost thirty years since anybody called me that, in that way. With respect, I mean. With a certain kind of dependence on me . . . Father."

Eddie got hold of him by the throat angrily and yanked his head up.

"You listen to me, you old lush! Jack asked you something. Where's that money?"

"What?" Padre repeated. He did not seem to understand the question. He was frowning absently. "I had to tell him I'd be around first thing tomorrow morning with the Host," he said. "I think I may have helped him a little. When I gave him Absolution afterwards, he kissed my hand. He actually—"

Pete, who had been staring fixedly ahead through the windshield, his lips compressed, started the car. Nothing more was said. It must have been all decided between them, just as they had decided to wait for Padre while he was still in the house.

They drove onto a dingy street farther west under the shadows of an overhead roadway that was being constructed, and there they drove up and around on a half-finished approach ramp. There was a kind of platform at the top of it, with lumber and big concrete mixers scattered about; before them a waist-high stone

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parapet; and beyond that the river.

No other cars could be seen, and no other people; no illumination except the intermittent gleam of a blinker light down on the next corner. Red, dark, red, dark. Padre found himself thinking with a curious and altogether aimless detachment of mind. Bitter cold cheer this night against the January rain and against the cluster of faint lights way over on the Jersey side—or not cheer at all, really . . . Father.

"Padre," Pete said, and unlike Eddie in a calm, perfectly controlled manner. "Where's the money?"

Padre might not have heard him at all.

"I had to—comfort him," he said. "But the only thing that came to me was what I had read once in the words of a French Jesuit priest—that a Christian must never be afraid of death, that he must welcome it, that it was the greatest act of faith he would ever make in this life, and that he must plunge joyfully into death as into the arms of his living and loving God. Then I led him on into the Act of Contrition—after I remembered it myself. And somehow I did remember it. Hoist by my own petard, then—" and once more he had to laugh softly. " 'Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee—' That's how it starts, you know. And once I'd repeated that for him—would any of you have a drink for me?"

Pete got out of the car. So did Eddie. So did Jack Delgardo. One of them opened the door for Padre and took his arm. He got out obediently and then stood there.

"Padre," Pete said. "Where's the money?"

"What?" Padre said. The third time.

There were no more words wasted, just Eddie and Jack Delgardo closing in on him. They were quick about it and very efficient. They got Padre back against the stone parapet, which was some 80 or 90 feet above the river at this point, and there Eddie used his hands, and Jack Delgardo the tip of his right shoe.

There were almost no sounds, just the quick scrape of their feet on the paving, then a gasp, and then Padre falling. After that they allowed him to sit up groggily, muddy brown gutter water all over his black suit, his hat knocked off so that his gray hair could again be seen, and blood on his mouth.

"Now you just come on," Steady Eddie gritted. "We ain't even started on you. You ain't getting away with this, not now. We didn't make you come in with us. You promised you would. So do

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what we tell you, you phony old lush, or we'll—*Where's that money?"*

By then Padre had straightened against the parapet, supporting himself by his two hands, and breathing with shallow and labored effort.

"But it was never fair," he cried out. "Never fair! I was tempted not in one way during my life but in every possible way—and time after time! And now tonight, up in that room back there, I had to listen to myself saying something—whatever kept coming into my head. And not for him either—but for myself, don't you see? That it didn't matter how often we failed. That we only had to succeed at the end! That it wasn't trial after trial that was given to us. That it was chance after chance after chance! And that if only once, if only once and at the very finish of everything, we could say to Almighty God that we accepted the chance—"

Pete gestured Eddie and Jack Delgardo off and then moved back himself into somewhat better light so that the knife in his hand became clearly visible.

"You know what this is?" he said. "This is a knife. And you know, if you want to go ahead and make me, what I can do with it?"

He proceeded to say. He spoke in a clinically detached manner of various parts of the human body, of their extreme vulnerability to pain, and of what he could do with the knife—if he was forced. Very soon Padre, still hanging onto the parapet, had to turn shuddering away from that voice, and in blind panic. But on one side there was Steady Eddie waiting for him. On the other was Jack Delgardo.

"We'll even give you a square count," Steady Eddie urged, obviously thinking that part important, and at the same time offering a pint bottle of whiskey out of his overcoat pocket. "Honest to God, Padre. Just take a good long drink for yourself—and then think for a minute. Nothing like it, remember? God in a bottle."

And Padre needed that drink. He was beginning to feel the pain now—in his face, in the pit of his stomach, in his right knee. Which would be nothing at all, he realized, to the pain of the knife. Yes, then, he would tell. In the end, knowing himself, he knew he would have to tell.

But was it test after test that had always been demanded of him, venomously and to no purpose? Or was it, as he had found himself saying earlier tonight, chance after chance after chance

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that was offered—and the chance even now, it might be, to admit finally and for the first time in his life a greater love which, being the kind of man he was, or had insisted he was, he had always denied?

He still could not say. But how queer, it came to him, that the last denial of all, the only promise he had never violated, was now being demanded of him. But as proof of what? Of a thing he believed in his heart even yet, or of a thing he did not believe?

His hands were shaking. He looked at them, at the pint bottle they held, and then at the jagged cluster of rocks almost a hundred feet straight down that he could see at the very edge of the river. He had not drunk from the bottle yet. Now he attempted to and it had rolled out of his hands, as if accidentally, onto the parapet.

He wailed aloud, scrambling up desperately for the bottle, and before Steady Eddie could lose his contemptuous grin, before Jack Delgardo, turning his back to the wind, could light the match for his cigarette, and before Pete, now more distant than either of them, could move, Padre was standing erect on top of the parapet.

Pete shouted a warning. Steady Eddie rushed forward. But plunge joyfully, Padre was thinking—the chance taken, the trust maintained, the greater love at last and beyond any question admitted by him. Plunge joyfully!

That was the final thought in his head. After it, avoiding a frantic outward grab for his legs by Steady Eddie, Father Joseph Leo Shanahan moved quickly but calmly to the edge of the parapet, crossed himself there, put up the other hand in a last moment of weakness to cover his eyes—and stepped straight out.

Then the blinker light shone down on a stone ledge empty save for the still corked whiskey bottle, and there were left only the three men, but not the fourth, to gape stupidly and unbelievingly from back in the shadows.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

People, mostly young, stricken with a strange and puzzling illness . . .

"You think they were poisoned?" Captain Leopold asked the Director of Public Health.

"It's either that or the beginning of a mystery outbreak like that legionnaire sickness in Philadelphia."

Detectives and doctors, faced with the same mystery, look for different things. But these different things, joined, put together, can become one—one solution . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD LOOKS FOR THE CAUSE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Jim Standish awoke that morning feeling good. He'd felt good just about every morning since leaving home and high school and coming to this city on the north shore of Long Island Sound. He glanced out the window at the sun and decided this was the day he'd been waiting for. Slipping into the new T-shirt and jeans he'd bought a week earlier, he took special care to comb his long hair into presentable neatness. When he finished, he decided he was ready to meet and mingle with the squares of the world.

He left his one-room apartment and went down to the lunch counter on the corner for breakfast, as he did every morning. The waitress there, a twenty-year-old blonde named Rita, was a runaway like himself. They'd struck up a friendship and she'd even spent the night with him once last month. But she'd made it clear she wasn't getting permanently involved with a kid two years younger than herself with no money and skimpy prospects. "I'm going to marry a rich man some day," she told him. "They

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like younger women. Just you wait and see!"

He'd chuckled and said, "Not much chance of a rich man coming by the Sunrise Diner."

The Sunrise was in a part of the city marked for urban renewal—a block of bars and shops and one-room apartments that had been allowed to decay while waiting for the wrecker's ball. It was an area that naturally attracted young runaways like Jim and Rita, who hoped for better things but didn't yet have the means to obtain them.

This day, a warm morning in mid-August, Jim Standish ordered his usual breakfast of orange juice, toast, and coffee. When Rita brought it over, he asked, "Notice anything different today?"

"You're all dandied up, aren't you? Goin' after that job?"

He nodded. "I didn't like the idea of parking cars in the rain, but I guess on a day like this it's okay."

"When you make your first million, come back and see me." She disappeared into the rear after another order.

He scooped some sugar from the bowl on the table and stirred it in his coffee. The taste of Sunrise coffee seemed worse than usual, but it didn't bother him any more. "I might just do that," he called after her.

He left a dime tip next to his plate to impress her with his new affluence and headed down Bay Street toward the parking lot. On the way he passed Milt Trebbor's surplus-clothing store and Uncle Max's pawnshop. He waved to both men but didn't stop. Uncle Max had already got everything he had to pawn.

At the parking lot Sammy Adams eyed his approach with open disdain. "Well, sunshine—decide you'd take the job after all?"

"If it's still open."

"I work my tail off parkin' cars in the rain yesterday and you come around today when the sun's shinin'!"

"Sorry. I wasn't feeling good yesterday." The lie had barely left his lips when a sudden wave of nausea swept over him. My God, he thought, the power of the mind!

Sammy Adams sighed and motioned him forward. "I'm so hard up for help I'll take what I can get. Now look, I got one rule—no stealin' things from the cars. The last kid I had workin' for me took a lady's house key off her ring and went off to rob her on his lunch hour. The lady came back early, saw it was missing, and called the fuzz. They caught the crazy kid runnin' through the backyard and shot him in the leg. So no stealin'. Understand?"

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"I understand."

"Okay, we already talked about pay. You'll get your first check a week from Friday. Now let's park cars."

Jim moved after him, feeling a pain in his abdomen. He hoped he wasn't going to be truly sick. Sammy Adams would never swallow that on his first day. But the pain seemed to pass as he climbed behind the wheel of his first car. He started the motor, shifted into reverse, and then doubled over the steering wheel in a spasm of pain. The car rocketed backward, smashing into the front of a Buick behind it.

Sammy Adams came running up, yanking open the door on the driver's side. "Get outa there, you bum! Who the hell ever taught you how to drive?"

"I'm . . . sick . . ," Jim Standish managed to gasp.

"You'll be a lot sicker when I get through with you! The money for that front end is comin' outa your hide!"

Jim tried to get out of the car, tried to stand up, but he couldn't. His muscles were twitching and he started to throw up. Then he doubled up and collapsed at Sammy's feet.

"I've come to you for help, Captain Leopold," the man across the desk said. His name was Dr. Walter Kersey and he was the city's Director of Public Health. It was not a full-time position in a city this size, and Leopold knew he maintained a small medical practice on the side. Still, he was serious and conscientious about his job, and Leopold had always liked the man.

"Violent crime in the hospitals, Doctor?" Leopold asked, trying to lighten the man's somber mood.

"It's violent, but I don't know if it's crime or not. Here's the situation—the media will have the story by evening but I wanted you to hear it from me first. We've got six cases of an odd malady in the city—an extremely serious malady that seems to be striking only young people. A sixteen-year-old girl has died and five other young people between the ages of twelve and twenty-three are in hospitals around town with surprisingly similar symptoms."

"You think they were poisoned?"

"It's either that or the beginning of a mystery outbreak like that legionnaire sickness in Philadelphia. Frankly, I don't know which I'd fear more."

"What are their symptoms?" Leopold started to take notes.

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"Pallor, rapid heartbeat, irregular breathing, muscle twitches, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, sharp abdominal pains, all leading to mental confusion and finally coma. Four of the five survivors are comatose now. The other, a boy of eighteen who was just brought in this morning, is still conscious."

"Were they all living at home?"

Dr. Kersey shook his head. "Oddly enough, only the twelve-year-old. Four of the other five, including the dead girl, were runaways, living on their own in the inner city. The twenty-three-year-old man is married but living in the same general area."

"Anything racial?"

Dr. Kersey shook his head. "Two of the victims are black, four are white. The only common denominator is youth. If they were poisoned it could be by someone who hates young people."

"Can't your lab turn up traces of the poison?"

"Believe me, we're working on it. But in the meantime we need some good old-fashioned detective work. Who've you got for us?"

Leopold considered it. Connie Trent was on a well-earned vacation in Canada, and Lieutenant Fletcher was investigating a messy case in which a man had hacked to death five members of his family. A couple of the younger detectives were working with Fletcher. "Myself," he said, answering the doctor's question. "I'm the only one available."

The latest victim of the mystery illness, a young man named Jim Standish, had been brought to the emergency room at Parkside Hospital from a parking lot near the downtown area where he'd just started working. Leopold stepped through the curtains of the cubicle and looked down at the youth trapped in a maze of wires and tubes.

"What are you doing for him?"

"Their first thought was that he'd had a diabetic seizure," Dr. Kersey explained. "Since that's been ruled out they've been treating him with atropine—one milligram injected intramuscularly every two hours—plus intravenous fluids to replace those he's lost through sweating, salivation, and diarrhea."

Leopold stepped closer to the bed. "Can you hear me, Jim?"

"Yes," the voice answered weakly. "What's the matter with me?"

"That's what we're all trying to find out. I'm a detective, Jim,

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and I'm checking the possibility you might have been poisoned. There are five other young people sick just like you." He didn't mention that one of them was dead.

"God, I feel terrible . . . I can't think clearly . . ."

"Were you on drugs, Jim?"

"No."

"What did you eat today?"

"Just breakfast, at a lunch counter. The Sunrise."

"Nothing else? No soft drink or beer or candy bar?"

"No."

Leopold could see talking was difficult for him. "All right, rest now. I'll talk to you later."

Outside he asked Dr. Kersey, "Who's running the tests on them?"

"A brilliant young pathologist named Dr. Gaylord. Come on, I think you two should meet."

Dr. Gaylord worked out of Parkside Hospital, so they took the elevator to the floor where the pathology labs were located. When Dr. Kersey introduced him, Leopold tried to hide his surprise at the fact that Dr. Gaylord was a handsome young woman with brown bangs and a friendly smile. "I've heard so much about you, Captain Leopold," she said in a voice at once soft and commanding. "It seems the papers are always full of your cases."

"They give more space to my failures than my successes."

"I hope they won't be giving space to my failures." She glanced back at the microscope and rack of test tubes over which she'd been working when they arrived. He noticed she wore no rings.

"Any luck yet?" Dr. Kersey asked.

"All of it bad. There's a high white-cell count that made me suspect bacillary dysentery, but a microscopic examination of the patients' stool specimens ruled that out. I have one other suspicion and I'm waiting now for the results of plasma cholinesterase tests. They're too elaborate for me to perform here."

Leopold was just a bit awed by the wealth of knowledge she seemed to possess. He'd known pathologists twice her age who knew far less, or at least acted like it. "I'm working on the theory it was some sort of food poisoning," he told her.

She gave him a dimpled smile. "Check back with me in two hours and I may be able to give you a yes or no. My inclination right now is to say no, but we can't be sure."

Outside, Dr. Kersey said, "She's quite a gal. I'd trust her diag-

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nosis more than that of most men."

"I'll call her in two hours," Leopold agreed. "Right now I think I should check out the area where Jim Standish lived—and especially the Sunrise lunch counter."

He knew the block well, as he knew most blocks in the inner city. He knew them from the nightly reports of muggings and stabbings, and the drug busts and porno raids at election time. This block, especially, had figured in the news of late, because of a partisan political battle over whether or not it should be demolished.

Walking along it now, Leopold stuck his head in the doorway of Uncle Max's pawnshop and said hello. "Captain! They got you back pounding a beat, maybe?"

"Not yet, Max. I'm helping the public-health people check out reports of illness."

"The young people—I heard." Max himself was far from old, though his prematurely white hair and beard gave an illusion of both age and wisdom. He'd been robbed three times in the past year—once with a savage beating thrown in for good measure—which was how he'd come to know Leopold.

"Might be the start of an epidemic."

"Like Philadelpia's last year?"

"We hope not. Only six cases so far, and one death." He took out a list of victims and read off the names. "Know any of them?"

"By name? Only one—Jim Standish. I saw him just this morning. The others I might know by their faces."

"Did Standish ever deal with you?"

"Everyone on the block deals with Uncle Max."

"Who told you about the illnesses? It hasn't been in the papers yet."

"The word gets around."

"But how did it get around this time?"

"Rita—the waitress at the Sunrise."

"Thanks," Leopold said, and went on.

He'd stopped in the Sunrise Diner for coffee once or twice, but not often enough to know any of the help. Only one man seemed to be on duty in mid-afternoon, cleaning grease from the griddle.

"Is Rita around?" Leopold asked, sliding onto a stool.

"Off duty. She's in the back changing."

"Ask her if I could have a word with her. It's police business."

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The man's eyes widened at the sight of the badge, but he said nothing. He disappeared into the back and returned in a moment to inform Leopold, "I guess you just missed her. She's gone."

Leopold thanked the man and went quickly outside. Circling the short block, he came to an alley that led to a little parking area used by Sunrise employees. A black Chevy was just pulling out when he stopped it.

"Are you Rita?"

"That's my name," she answered.

"You needn't have ducked out the rear door. I just want to ask you about one or two of your customers."

She backed into the parking space and got out of the car. "All right, what's it about?"

Leopold wondered what she had to fear. "I'm a detective captain, but right now I'm working with the public-health director to track down an illness that's stricken six young people in this area. The latest victim, Jim Standish, had breakfast here this morning. Do you know him?"

"I know him. He's a runaway, if that's what you wanted to ask me."

"When they get to be eighteen I stop caring. He can live his own life at that age, if he has any of it left to live."

"What's that mean?"

"He's a pretty sick boy. There are others even worse." He showed her the list of names. "Are any of the others Sunrise customers?"

She scanned it quickly. "That Cathy might be. I know lots of girls named Cathy."

"Did Standish seem ill this morning?"

"Not that I noticed."

"What'd he eat?"

"Orange juice, toast. And coffee."

"Cream and sugar in the coffee?"

"Just sugar, I think. But I didn't pay that close attention."

"Let's go back inside, Rita."

"Look, I gotta hair appointment."

"This won't take a minute."

She stalked back in, acting as if she were under arrest. The man behind the counter glanced up, then busied himself at some task. "What is it you want?" she asked Leopold.

"Which sugar bowl did Standish use?"

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"This one on the counter, I suppose. I wasn't watching."

Leopold dipped his finger in and tasted it. Sugar, all right. "This is supposed to be separately packaged," he told the girl. "I'm surprised the Board of Health hasn't got after you."

"I don't own the place."

"Who does?"

"Mr. Hammish. He's only here nights. I don't see much of him and I'm just as happy about that."

"How well did you know Standish?"

She shrugged. "I went out with him once or twice. But he's just a kid—only eighteen."

"Did he have any enemies?"

"No. Everybody liked him."

He asked about enemies because it was hard for him to accept the concept of some unknown disease. He felt more comfortable pursuing a human foe—an unseen poisoner ready to drop pellets into coffee cups.

Leopold was about to question her about others who'd been at the counter with Standish when Uncle Max came in. "There's been another one," he told them. "I thought you'd want to know, Captain."

"Another illness?"

"Looks like it. Fellow who works in Milt Trebbor's surplus store."

Leopold followed him down the street to the store where a small crowd had been attracted by the arrival of an ambulance. Milt Trebbor was out in front, his face ashen with fear. A man wearing a red sweatshirt and jeans was being lifted onto the stretcher by two white-coated attendants.

Leopold introduced himself to the shop owner, a man he knew by sight but had never really met. "What happened here?"

"He had pains and vomiting. Then he just sort of collapsed. I called the ambulance quick!" Trebbor was a little man with an intense expression. Leopold had heard rumors that his stock of surplus goods sometimes included stolen merchandise, but nothing had ever been proved against him.

Glancing down at the man on the stretcher, Leopold observed the lines about his mouth and eyes. "He's no boy!"

"'Course not! Never said he was! Mike Wanamaker's been workin' for me five, six years now. He's in his mid-forties."

The first older victim. Leopold tried to fathom what it meant

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and decided he needed to call Dr. Gaylord. "Can I use your phone?" he asked Trebbor.

"Sure—in the office."

He dialed the hospital and asked for Dr. Gaylord. When she came on her voice was almost cheerful. "I've got news for you, Captain—good news and bad news. Which do you want first?"

"Give me the bad first."

"One of the teen-age boys died. But it's not too surprising. They're all in critical condition and we'll be lucky if even a few pull through."

"What's your good news?"

"The victims' plasma cholinesterase level is only forty percent of normal, and the red-cell level is down to seventeen. I think they're suffering from organic phosphate poisoning."

"That's good news?"

"It's good news that we've identified it. Now it's up to you to find the source."

"Just what is organic phosphate?"

"An insecticide. It used to be widely sprayed from planes over farm areas. But lately the environmentalists have successfully limited its use, because of the dangers to human and animal life. Five drops of it on the skin is a fatal dose."

"It can be absorbed through the skin?"

"That's the commonest danger. Read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* if you want to know more about it."

"I don't have too much time for reading right now. We've got another case of it down here." He quickly outlined the circumstances. "This is the first victim over twenty-five. What do you make of it, Doctor?"

"If we're dealing with organic phosphate poisoning, as I'm convinced we are, age is no factor. It's more a matter of exposure. What could those teen-agers be doing that the latest victim was also doing?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. "But I'm going to find out."

When he came out of the office, Milt Trebbor was back to work, sorting through a pile of blue jeans as if nothing had happened. "Think Mike'll pull through?" he asked Leopold.

"I'm no doctor. I'm more interested in what's causing all these illnesses. Do you know any of the other victims?"

"A couple. Mostly they're from this neighborhood." He motioned toward the counter where the early edition of the afternoon paper

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lay open to a story on the mysterious illnesses. "Not the twelve-year-old, though. He's from the suburbs."

There were pictures of some of the young people accompanying the article, and Leopold looked them over, trying to see something in their faces that would hint at the cause of their illness. But he could see nothing. "Dr. Gaylord at Parkside Hospital thinks the illness is caused by organic phosphate poisoning," he told Trebbor. "Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Insecticide, isn't it? They sure wouldn't be sprayin' that stuff around the city."

"No, they wouldn't," Leopold agreed. "Well, thanks for your help, anyway."

"Let me know about Mike's condition, will you?"

"I'll do that."

"If it's anything contagious—"

"It's not, as far as we know."

Leopold went back down to the Sunrise Diner, but the waitress Rita was no longer there. Then he retraced Standish's most likely route from the diner to the parking lot where he'd collapsed. The lot's manager, a rat-faced man in his thirties named Sammy Adams, was busy moving cars as the late afternoon rush-hour got under way. "Can't talk now," he told Leopold. "Too busy. All alone since that damned Standish took sick!"

"That's what I want to talk about," Leopold said, showing his badge. "We're investigating his illness."

"Damn kid smashed up a couple of cars! That's enough to make anybody sick."

"Wasn't he ill earlier?"

"Hell, he's been telling me all week he's been sick, but I figured he just didn't feel like parkin' cars in the rain. When the sun came out today he was ready to work."

Leopold showed him the list of other victims. "Know any of them?"

"Not a one, at least not by name."

"None of them parked here?"

"Nope." He hesitated, then added, "But Mike Wanamaker is one of my customers. That's his Ford there. I saw the ambulance taking him away."

"Did he seem sick this morning?"

"Nope. Seemed the same as always to me."

"Okay," Leopold said. "I'll get back to you."

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He left Sammy Adams shuffling his cars and walked back along the block of shops and bars. Uncle Max was out again, chatting with a couple of jeans-clad teen-agers about an item they wanted to pawn. It looked like a typewriter and Leopold wondered if they'd ripped it off from one of the nearby office buildings. There were more young people farther along, all looking the same, all dressed the same. He decided it was an age of conformity disguised as independence.

Leopold drove out to Parkside Hospital again, as much to see Dr. Gaylord as to pursue the investigation. She was at work in her office adjoining the lab, poring over the questionnaires assembled on the victims of the mystery illness.

"Anything new?" he asked.

"Oh, hello! Not yet, but we're working on the cure." She lifted her glasses to her forehead and leaned back in the chair. "I've suggested an injection of five hundred milligrams of pralidoxime chloride, and it seems to be helping. It's a specific treatment for organic phosphate poisoning."

"Then they'll pull through?"

She shrugged. "It's too soon to tell. All we can do is hope."

"No luck with these?" he asked, gesturing toward the questionnaires fanned out on the desk before her.

"Well, I've just received the one on Mike Wanamaker and it's far from complete because of his condition. As you know, he's the oldest of the seven by far. And I'll admit to not knowing exactly how he fits in with the others."

"He works in Milt Trebbor's surplus store, right in the middle of the block where most of the others congregated."

"That's true of Jim Standish and the two who died and two others," she agreed. "But what about the twelve-year-old from the suburbs?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. He drew up a chair and started glancing at the forms. An idea came to him. "Trebbor's something of a shady character. Maybe he wanted to kill Wanamaker and poisoned the others first so that Wanamaker's death wouldn't be noticed."

"But it *is* noticed, Captain," Dr. Gaylord argued logically, "simply because he's so much older than the other six. If this man Trebbor had a scheme like that, he'd have chosen victims closer to Wanamaker's age, wouldn't he?"

"Of course," Leopold agreed with a sigh. She had brains, too.

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"I think it's a medical mystery and nothing else. Seven people got into something—somehow, somewhere."

He returned to the questionnaires. "Of those able to answer before they went into comas, four had eaten at the Sunrise Diner within a day or two of their illness. Three were connected in some way with Sammy's parking lot—and I can add a fourth. Mike Wanamaker parked his car there. And they were all familiar with Trebbor's surplus store and Uncle Max's pawnshop, except the twelve-year-old."

"You think it's one of those four places?"

"I'm certain of it." He pulled a big yellow pad over to him and drew a straight line on it. "Look, this is Bay Street, with the Sunrise at one end and Sammy's parking lot at the other. Those can be our somewhat arbitrary limits for the moment. Trebbor's store is here, and Max's shop is just three doors away. Now I'll put a small x at the points where the victims got sick, omitting the youngest victim at the moment. We have Standish at the parking lot, and Wanamaker at the surplus store. What about the other four?"

She picked up a pencil to help him with the markings. "Two of them were stricken in other parts of the city, but they live in the Bay Street area. The other two were actually on the street when taken ill. Here's another oddity I've noticed, though I can't explain it. In every case the onset of the illness came in late morning or early afternoon—never in the evening or first thing on arising. That in itself is strange."

"It suggests some exposure around breakfast time, doesn't it? What about the twelve-year-old?"

She consulted one of the questionnaires. "He just doesn't fit with the others. His mother says he hasn't been downtown for weeks, and to her knowledge he's never been on the Bay Street block in his life."

"It's a puzzlement," he admitted. "I'm going down and see if I can talk to Standish or one of the other patients. I might learn something."

"I've seen them all, even the ones at the other hospitals, and it hasn't helped me."

"Well, maybe doctors and policemen look for different things. I'll check back with you."

"Good luck."

When she was alone, Dr. Gaylord started in again at her task,

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poring over the data they'd gathered thus far. She decided to check the tissue samples in the lab once more and went in there, leaving the connecting door open a few inches. The samples were as expected, showing nothing new under the microscope. She sat back, thinking about Captain Leopold and what he'd said—that doctors and policemen look for different things. Was it true?

Was there any difference in a poisoning victim—or a gunshot victim, for that matter—when viewed by a policeman and by a doctor? Certainly doctors were more interested in the effect than in the cause, while the opposite might be true of the police. But was there something else? Was there something the doctor never saw which might be the key to her whole problem?

Something the doctor never saw but the policeman did . . .

She heard a noise from the adjoining office and realized someone was in there. She walked back through the connecting door and confronted a man she'd never seen before, bent over her desk. "What do you want?" she asked.

He straightened up, surprised.

She saw him grab for a metal bookend on her desk and she tried to scream, but he was too fast.

There was a flash of light as he hit her, then nothing . . .

It was toward evening before Leopold heard the news, and he hastened to the hospital. The first familiar face he saw belonged to Dr. Kersey. "Hello, Captain. I'm glad you could come."

"How is she?" he asked, surprised at how much it mattered.

"A bad concussion, but she'll pull through. There doesn't seem to be any brain damage."

"Could she say who did it?"

"A man, that's all. She caught a man in her office. Probably a sneak thief. We've had trouble with them before."

"Any description?"

He shook his head. "She's only semiconscious, and rambling."

"Can I see her?"

Dr. Kersey hesitated. "I'll ask the physician in charge." He returned in a moment and motioned Leopold inside. "Just for a minute," he whispered.

Her head was swathed in bandages and she lay back on the pillow with her eyes closed. Leopold bent over and spoke her name.

The eyes opened, and he saw that they were brown like the hair now hidden from view. "I . . ."

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"It's Captain Leopold, Doctor."

". . . close . . ."

"Close?"

The eyes closed and then opened again. "Clothes," she said more distinctly.

"What about clothes?"

". . . doctors never see them with their clothes on . . ."

Leopold thought about that. "No, I suppose they don't," he said finally.

Her eyes closed and the doctor touched his arm. "You'd better leave now."

Back in the hall he found Dr. Kersey again. "Young Standish is here, isn't he? And some of the others?"

He nodded. "Two of them."

"I want to see the clothes they were wearing when they were brought in."

He already had a pretty good idea of what he would find.

The store lights were already on along Bay Street, bathing the pavement with a mixture of neon and fluorescence that reflected off the puddles where the street flusher had been through. Uncle Max was sweeping the sidewalk in front of his pawnshop and he waved as Leopold approached. But Leopold turned in at Milt Trebbor's surplus store, where the owner was just turning out the lights.

"Hello, Captain. We're closing up."

"No, you're not."

"Oh? How's Mike?"

"Mike's good. The woman you almost killed isn't nearly as good."

"What?" Trebbor tried to move back, out of reach, but Leopold was too fast. He grabbed the man by the front of his shirt. "What in hell is this?"

"It's attempted murder, you skunk—and I'll bet we can dig up at least seven charges of criminal negligence to go with it. Now where's that pile of jeans?"

"What jeans?"

"The ones I saw you looking through this afternoon. They were right here on this counter."

"I—I guess I sold them all."

"Guess again."

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"They were dirty. I threw them out."

"Let's go out in back and find them."

"Honest, Captain, I swear to God I didn't know it was the jeans! Not till today when Mike got sick!"

"And then you remembered me mentioning that Dr. Gaylord at Parkside was working on it and you went there to find out what she knew, because you were afraid those people would sue you."

"I didn't mean to hit her, Captain! It was an accident!"

Leopold had his handcuffs out. "Lock the door, Trebbor. You are going to show me where those jeans are and then I'm taking you down to Headquarters. You have a right to consult a lawyer, but anything you say from now on may be used against you."

Dr. Gaylord was sitting up in bed when Leopold came to call.

"Captain! Are those flowers for me?"

"I felt it was the least I could do. I mentioned your name to someone and that caused all this, I'm afraid." He handed the flowers to a nurse and took four pictures from his pocket. "Just for the record I'd like you to look at these."

She pointed to Trebbor's mug shot without hesitation. "That's the man who hit me."

"Fine! You'll get a chance to identify him in a lineup later, though there's a possibility he'll decide to plead guilty to an assault charge."

"How did you find him so quickly?"

Leopold hesitated, a little embarrassed. "You know, I've never even heard your first name. It's hard to go on calling you Dr. Gaylord."

She laughed then, and it was a sunny sound he liked. "My name is Lawn, but please don't make any jokes about it. I went all through school with boys who wanted to mow me."

"Lawn Gaylord. It's a pretty name."

"Never mind my name. Tell me about this man who hit me."

"Milt Trebbor. He runs a surplus store on Bay Street. Apparently he bought a shipment of blue jeans cheap because something had been spilled on them."

"Organic phosphate! Blue jeans—now I remember there was a similar case in California back in 1961 and Berton Roueché wrote about it in his book *The Orange Man*."

"I didn't know about the book," Leopold admitted, "but I should have known about the jeans sooner than I did. I noticed the young

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people in that block all wore jeans, as so many young people do today, and you'd told me the poison could be absorbed through the skin. I was even there when Wanamaker was carried out, and saw that he was wearing jeans too. In fact, right after that I found Trebbor inspecting the jeans in his store when I went to question him. It had just occurred to him what the trouble was.

"If he'd admitted it then, instead of slugging you and trying to cover up, he'd be in a lot less trouble now. But he was afraid of lawsuits that could ruin him. He knew the jeans were stained when he bought them, but the stains didn't show when they dried and he thought no more about them. Funny thing—he says he sold twenty-two pair during the past two weeks, but only seven people were stricken."

"Some might not have been badly stained," Lawn Gaylord guessed. "Or more likely, the buyers simply washed them before wearing them the first time. I understand girls often do, to shrink them a bit. But those who wore them without washing absorbed the poison into their bodies. After a few hours' wear the symptoms developed."

"Which explains the time element that had us puzzled. But you really gave me the clue when you mumbled about doctors never seeing the victims with their clothes on."

She put a hand to her head. "I don't even remember talking to you. But it's true—for an internal illness like this, the first thing the emergency-room staff does is remove the patient's clothing. The examining doctor would have no way of knowing they were dressed in identical jeans, even if it had been the same doctor—which of course it wasn't."

Leopold nodded. "I checked the clothes Standish and the other Parkview patients were wearing when brought in—new jeans in every case. Then I phoned the mother of the twelve-year-old. She confirmed that she'd bought him a pair of jeans at Trebbor's store. That was all I needed. He still didn't have to be the one who slugged you, but when I remembered telling him your name it seemed a pretty good bet."

He stood up and moved toward the door. "We've talked too much for one day. You need your rest."

She smiled at him, dimpling. "You know, now you have me at a disadvantage."

"How's that?"

"What's *your* first name, Captain Leopold?"

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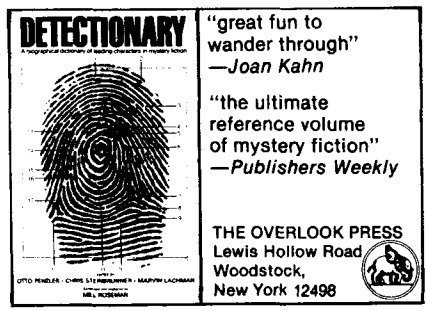

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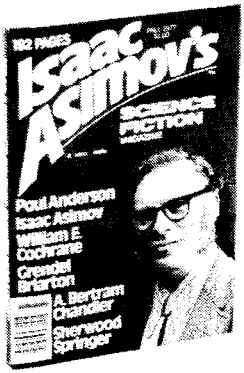

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